New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 14 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 6, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1946 Vol.

Stage Play	Page
Androcles and the Lion	217
*Annie Get Your Gun	382
Another Part of the Forest	247
Beggar's Holiday	204
*Born Yesterday	466
*Burlesque	208
*Call Me Mister	403
Christopher Blake	233
Cyrano de Bergerac	321
Fatal Weakness (The)	251
*Happy Birthday	280
Henry VIII	271
Iceman Cometh (The)	315
Joan of Lorraine	255
John Gabriel Borkman	263
Lady Windermere's Fan	307
Lovely Me	211
Made In Heaven	292
O Mistress Mine	474
Park Avenue	275
Playboy of the Western World (The)	287
Pound on Demand	217
Present Laughter	283
Show Boat	496
Temper the Wind	197
Toplitzky of Notre Dame	201
What Every Woman Knows	268
Wonderful Journey	214
Years Ago	229

1945 Vol.

Carousel	226
Red Mill (The)	141
State of the Union	102

1944 Vol.

*Anna Lucasta	143
*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 6, 1947*

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1947
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page
Alice in Wonderland	398
*All My Sons	475
As You Like It	451
Barefoot Boy With Cheek	402
Bathsheba	415
Big Two (The)	494
*Brigadoon	427
Chocolate Soldier (The)	431
*Command Decision	328
Craig's Wife	457
Eagle Has Two Heads (The)	421
*Finian's Rainbow	486
Hamlet	447
Heads or Tails	377
*Heiress (The)	335
*How I Wonder	332
I Gotta Get Out	343
Importance of Being Earnest (The)	439
It Takes Two	469
*John Loves Mary	465
King Lear	453
Laura	353
Little A	483
Louisiana Lady	362
Love for Love	367
Love Goes to Press	497
Magic Touch (The)	348
*Medium (The)	379
Merchant of Venice (The)	450
Message for Margaret	393
Miracle in the Mountains	387
*Music In My Heart	324
Open House	359
*Our Lan'	339
Parlor Story	436
Portrait in Black	371
Story of Mary Surratt (The)	461
Street Scene	490
Sweethearts	479
*Telephone (The)	379
Tenting Tonight	406
*Under the Counter	320
Volpone	448
Whole World Over (The)	411
Yellow Jack	443
*Young Man's Fancy (A)	383

Critics' Circle Award 392
Pulitzer Award 376

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 6, 1947*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Our Lan' "
"The Heiress"
"How I Wonder"
"I Gotta Get Out"
"Command Decision"
"Music In My Heart"
"Under the Counter"

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Under the Counter"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 4, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since we love our British cousins, wish to bridge the pond, cement relations and all that sort of thing, the problem of what to do about "Under the Counter" is perplexing. Probably it should be reviewed by the State Department. After running in London for a couple of seasons it turned up last evening at the Shubert Theater, with Cicely Courtneidge playing the Four Marx Brothers and Beatrice Lillie across the board.

Miss Courtneidge, who appeared here in 1925 in "By-the-Way," is a female knockabout comedienne who works hard with good heart and spirit and ought to be very funny. In London audiences regard her as very funny indeed, which is certainly evidence for her side.

* * *

Arthur Macrae's "Under the Counter" is a pot-pourri, to put it nicely, of satire about the black market, music hall burlesque and drawing-room comedy. To London audiences the lampoon on the black market is probably funnier than it is in America. Here the black market has been exchanged for inflation, which is regarded as better for the morals of the people.

But the basic function of "Under the Counter" is to provide a framework on which Miss Courtneidge can turn somersaults and double-takes. She is always on stage, except possibly for a split second, and always hard at work and in full cry. Keeping a conventional love story in motion by remote control, she flounces good-naturedly all over the stage, tossing gags, mugging, doing imitations, carrying on all evening.

To enjoy this type of rough-and-ready humor you have to be in at the beginning and go with it all the way. You cannot enjoy isolated bits of it; you have to absorb the entire performance and fatten on its vaudeville abundance. With all proper respect for Miss Courtneidge as a person in the theatre, this reviewer is not her audience. Being peculiarly English, "Under the Counter" is not one of England's most durable export articles and will probably not relieve the shortage of dollars. Maybe the State Department could put the matter more elegantly.

'UNDER THE COUNTER.'

Comedy with music by Arthur Macrae; music by Manning Sherwin; lyrics by Harold Purcell; directed by Jack Hulbert; scenery by Clifford Pember; dances arranged by Hulbert and John Gregory; presented by Lee Ephraim in association with the Shuberts at the Shubert Theater Friday evening, October 3, 1947. The cast:

Eva	Winifred Hindle
Detective-Inspector Baxter	Francis Roberts
Miss Kenderdine	Ballard Berkeley
Tim Garret	Thorley Walters
Jo Fox	Cicely Courtneidge
Mr. Burroughs	George Street
Zoe Trition	Glen Alyn
Kitty	Ingrid Forrest
Sir Alec Dunne	Wilfrid Hyde White
Lieut.-Commander Hugo	Conway.
R. N. V. R.	John Gregory
Mr. Appleyard	Frederick Farley

SYNOPSIS: The play takes place in Jo Fox's house in London. Act I—Monday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1—Wednesday morning. Scene 2—Thursday evening. Act III—Friday morning.

New York Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 4, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Needs a Lavagetto

FOR much of an act "Under the Counter," at the Shubert Theater, makes one beholden to our cousins across the sea. With the veteran Cicely Courtneidge taking full comic advantage of topical lines and a good song or two, this British importation has considerable pace, flavor and originality. From that point on, it is only possible to wonder why the Arthur Macrae comedy with music ever lasted for a couple of seasons in London before Lee Ephriam and the Messrs. Shubert decided to inflict it on local audiences. Certain it is that it demonstrates that there are more barriers than language in amusement-purveying.

* * *

The trouble is that the latest musical offering to reach town has three acts and the last two are deplorable. All the laughter that is quietly conjured up for a brief interlude in what amounts to an over-blown music hall sketch, is converted into yawns in the latter stanzas of the work. Miss Courtneidge tries valiantly to rescue a curious combination of didoes by interminable telephone conversations, pratt-falls and supposedly antic costumes. Without witty lines or amusing intimate revue shindigs, she is as powerless as the comely chorus girls to make "Under the Counter" half-way satisfying.

* * *

As the title suggests, the show touches on black market operations in England during the post-war period. It also has to do with the romantic complications of an elderly actress, who is courted by a foreign office secretary and a cabinet minister, but uses her wits to have a handsome major, stationed in Paris, returned to London and the theater in which he belongs. The situation is posed with considerable satirical inflection, but it falls as flat as a pop-over which refuses to rise. Such pleasant songs as "Everywhere" and "The Moment I Saw You," with music by Manning Sherwin and lyrics by Harold Purcell, give the piece the guise of entertainment, but they cannot save it from tedium.

* * *

The supporting company does not even get in the few antic licks that the star contrives in the first act. Ballard Berkeley is distrait and dull as the actress's favorite. Thorlery Walters, as a youngster suddenly precipitated into fast company is more uncomfortable than comic, and Wilfrid Hyde White, as the cabinet minister merely goes through motions. Jack Hulbert, who is Miss Courtneidge's husband in private life, has directed the show with a minimum of cumulat ive excitement. "Under the Counter" might better have stayed in London.

The Sun

OCTOBER 4, 1947

'Under the Counter' Very English, Very Flimsy, but Cicely Courtneidge Is Funny.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Piccadilly moved in upon Broadway last night, bringing along a curious piece of baggage called "Under the Counter," a comedy with a few songs and a little dancing, which began to play at the Sam S. Shubert Theater. This imported piece, brought direct from London, is very English and very flimsy, but Cicely Courtneidge is an amusing performer.

The cyclonic Miss Courtneidge is a singing comedienne and a skillful buffoon. She knows a lot of tricks and she uses them all. She goes in for mimicry, for low comedy, for high comedy, for everything, and she is all over the stage with the energy of Bobby Clark. During an evening's exercises she suggests several players, Beatrice Lillie included.

In this trifling "Under the Counter," Miss Courtneidge plays an actress engaged in black market operations, and who has several men in her life. She sings a few songs and goes about her clowning unflaggingly, and despite the handicaps of Arthur Macrae's feeble-minded script.

There is a pert and saucy chorus of young English girls in the Shubert's new play and such players as Thorley Walters, Glen Alyn, Wilfrid Hyde White and Frederick Farley work strenuously to make something of a piece that stayed in London for ever so long. The Kentucky-born London showman, Lee Ephraim, presents it here, in association with the Shuberts.

Good-neighbor relationship between Broadway and London's West End won't be necessarily enhanced by "Under the Counter," but it's good to have Cicely Courtneidge around again. She is making her first visit in more than twenty years. She's a hearty trouper and I'd be happier if she had better material. So would she.

New York Post

OCTOBER 4, 1947

Mild London Musical Play Ends Busy Drama Week

By Richard Watts Jr.

The drama season's first week of strenuous activity, which brought six new productions, including two hits, to Broadway since Saturday, came to a close last night, with the arrival from England of "Under the Counter" at the Shubert Theatre. It would be pleasant to report that this comedy with music, which ran for two years in London, was a satisfactory contribution to local gaiety, since the visitors are pleasant and eager. Cicely Courtneidge is vigorously humorous in the leading role, and the show provides a timely satirical glimpse into British life and laughter in this grim period of post-war austerity.

It is necessary, however, to be inhospitable to the visiting cousins long enough to whisper to them that their little musical effort, despite several entertaining virtues, is hardly likely to have the success it had at home. Miss Courtneidge, who was here before and has been rather ungraciously described as the poor man's Beatrice Lillie, is a skillful and inventive comedienne, and she can be extremely amusing upon occasion. For all her energy and art, she is nevertheless unable to keep "Under the Counter" properly alert after it has had the misfortune to fall into the doldrums.

The Doldrums

These doldrums, it must be added, arrive early in the second of the three acts. Since it is a comedy with music, rather than a musical comedy, "Under the Counter" has quite a bit of plot, which deals with the difficulty of living under austerity regulations, the temptation of the black market, and the misadventures of a popular actress who believes in the value of influence in helping one get around things. There are amiable satirical thrusts at Labor Party cabinet ministers, the civil service and other natural targets, and the spirit is good-natured.

For a while the agreeably humorous attitude towards the problems of everyday British living provides pleasant fun, and the characterizations are rather amusing. There is a disarming air of novelty present, and there is something splendidly independent about an English show which insists on talking about Boadicea, Selfridge's, Bevin boys, and other British interests, instead of trying to substitute references to, say, Brooklyn. There is also a nice song called "The Moment I Saw You."

But all too soon the novelty, freshness and high spirits of the imported charade begin to wear thin, a process which is not impeded by the excessive length of the proceedings. There are dreary stretches where the slenderness of the story becomes uncomfortably manifest, and in the end "Under the Counter" must be included among the disappointments. It is good to see Miss Courtneidge and her likable colleagues, but I am afraid that their vehicle lets them down.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 4, 1947

Cicely Courtneidge a One-Woman Riot in a Grand English Musical

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Cicely Courtneidge has been a darling of the London musical stage for many years. If she is very, very fond of her public over there, she has made a grave mistake in coming over here—because we should never permit her to go home.

She is one of the funniest women alive, combining the low comedy talents of Beatrice Lillie and Bobby Clark—and she can match Bobby for physical energy, too. Last evening she made a Shubert Theatre audience practically helpless by appearing, with several engaging compatriots, in a musical play titled "Under the Counter."

The play itself, a high-spirited affair by Arthur Macrae, is good comedy. It is no mere sketch, designed only to get Miss Courtneidge on and off the stage, but a delightful, complete job. At suitable moments it provides the star with oportunity for song numbers—and when that lady attacks a song number she wears it and herself to a frazzle. In comparison, Betty Hutton looks like a promising candidate for the role of Camille.

An Affable Company

"Under the Counter" tells of a well-off London actress who is a complete busybody and fixer. She gets black market liquor, lamb roasts, stockings, draperies and clothing coupons. She can wangle anything. One thing she wants to wangle is the transfer of an old beau from a government office in Paris to London, so that he may produce her next play for her. This involves moving right in on the British cabinet, which she does.

It is affably played by a talented group of Britons, including Ballard Berkeley as the old beau, Thorley Walters as a young diplomat with an urge to write music, Wilfrid Hyde White as an old diplomat with an urge to get married and Miss Glen Alyn as a handsome love interest. The imported chorus girls are very pretty, and prettily dressed.

"Under the Counter" is too well made to be just a one-woman show—but Miss Courtneidge is the one woman in it whenever she is on the stage, which is most of the time. She wiggles, she runs around, she fusses with flowers and hankies, she takes kicks in the pants and gives them and she all but kills herself doing a gypsy adagio dance. And at the proper time she can make her comedy sharp instead of broad.

Tailor-Made Songs.

The songs, by Manning Sherwin and Harold Purcell, weren't designed for the hit parade, exactly. They were designed for the woman who sings them, which is satisfactory.

Miss Courtneidge, the records say, came here once in 1925, when she was 32. I missed seeing her then, and haven't happened to run into any of her movies; so last night's offering was a case of love at first sight for me.

I am sure the Shubert brothers have a hit on their hands, but nevertheless would like to make them a suggestion. One or two of the production numbers are a bit too long and repetitious, and I think a touch of editing, particularly in the third act, would give the play a little better pace. My complaint, however, is a very minor one considering the show as a whole.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 4, 1947

'Under the Counter' Belongs There

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Cicely Courtneidge, a truly great comedienne, returned to New York last evening after too long an absence, bringing with her, unfortunately, a shoddy farce with music titled "Under the Counter."

"Under the Counter," we are told, was a big hit in London. That is quite understandable. The British seem to like their music hall humor broader than do we. The show has dozens of topical illusions to such British nuisances as the black market, austerity, etc., which probably provoked howls in the West End and will earn only yawns on Broadway.

Miss Courtneidge impersonates a wacky musical comedy star who goes into the black market to get materials for costumes and wheedles even cabinet ministers to have her boy friend and former producer transferred from a post in Paris back to London.

The feeble plot is the handiwork of Arthur Macrae. Manning Sherwin and Harold Purcell have provided several songs for Miss Courtneidge to sing. And there is a chorus of pretty girls who are seen too seldom.

Miss Courtneidge is a fine artist, as well as one of the world's funniest women. Her vitality is amazing. She bowls you over with her high spirits. And her skill is something to admire.

We cannot understand why Lee Empraim and the Shuberts decided to burden so gifted a star with such an anemic vehicle. Having done so, they would do well to send it to the storehouse and start preparing a revue, say a new "Ziegfeld Follies" or "Passing Show," for Miss Courtneidge.

And they might find roles in it for Thorley Walters and Wilfred Hyde White, who are about the only members of the current company who give her the support she merits.

In spite of her dismal material, Miss Courtneidge had the first nighters roaring through much of the evening. She had only to arch her eyebrows or say "boo" to garner laughter and applause.

The applause, of course, was a tribute to a magnetic and courageous personality, who worked such magic with nothing that she almost succeeded in creating the illusion that it was something.

"Under the Counter" is aptly named. That's where it belongs. But we shouldn't be too hard on it. After all, it did bring Miss Courtneidge back to us. And it should impress on American managers with top flight musicals that she would be quite wonderful in them.

PM Evening Edition

OCTOBER 6, 1947

Kronenberger

A Very Energetic Lady In a Quite Anemic Play

From London, where it ran for two years, has come a very English play with music, starring a very English comedienne. The play is a sort of drawing-room farce, a familiar British product that, while up-to-date enough in its allusions, seems well-nigh prehistoric in its general structure. It is agreeable for 15 or 20 minutes; agreeably silly for 15 or 20 more; then uncomfortably silly, and at last quite oppressively so. At last, moreover, means way past 11 o'clock.

The comedienne, Cicely Courtneidge, is a favorite in London, and clearly the reason why *Under the Counter* was such a favorite too. Miss Courtneidge is grey-haired, indefatigable and I suspect indestructible; her energy should become a byword, like Wilde's wit or Falstaff's avoirdupois. She is virtually never off the stage, except to change; and on stage she is never still. She runs, furthermore, what would be the gamut (in this country) from Ina Claire to a performing seal. She acts like a lady, she acts like a lug, she dances, she sings, she does imitations, she sweeps full-sail toward the audience, she moves skifflike toward the wings. Nor must we forget that she also plays a full-sized character named Jo Fox, an actress who spends most of her time wheedling and wrangling things out of people, black-marketeering and having her ups and downs in love.

* * *

Miss Courtneidge has her amusing moments, in addition to her amiable ones; and in a play by no means so tedious, and a part by no means so large, she might perhaps wins us over to London's way of thinking. But she is essentially, quintessentially, British, without the gift that would make her really international, too. And like many versatile people, she has no particular forte. Like many people, too, who themselves seem inexhaustible, she can be very exhausting. But whether or not an evening with Miss Courtneidge is an event, it is definitely an experience.

—Louis Kronenberger.

These are just a few of the many COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES now using NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS for a record of the theatre

University of Alabama
University of Alberta
University of Brit. Columbia
University of California
University of California, L. A.
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado
University of Delaware
University of Denver
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Houston
University of Illinois
University of Kentucky
University of Miami
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri
University of Nebraska
University of No. Carolina
University of Oklahoma
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh
University of Saskatchewan
University of South Dakota
University of So. California
University of Tennessee
University of Texas
University of Toledo
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
University of Washington
University of Wichita
University of Wisconsin
Baylor University
Brown University
Capital University
Columbia University
Cornell University
Denison University
Drake University
Emory University
George Washington University
Harvard University
Indiana University
John B. Stetson University
Louisiana State University
McGill University
Miami University
Northwestern University
Ohio State University
Ohio University
Ohio Wesleyan University
Phillips University
Princeton University
Purdue University
Queen's University (Canada)
St. John's University
Southern Ill. Normal University
Stanford University
State University of Iowa
Syracuse University
Temple University
Tulane University
Wayne University
Wesleyan University
Western Reserve University
Yale University
Alabama College
Alabama Polytechnic Inst.
Allegheny College
American Internat. Coll.
Beaver College
Bowdoin College
Bryn Mawr College
Carnegie Institute of Tech.
Cedar Crest College
Central Michigan College

Journal-American

OCTOBER 4, 1947

British Show Sickly Affair

By ROBERT GARLAND

Lend-lease still works in favor of the English. It's show business I've got in mind. Didn't we Americans lend those Englanders our "Oklahoma," now occupying their Theatre Royal in Drury Lane?

And haven't those Englanders leased us their "Under the Counter," now occupying our Shubert Theatre on the ally bearing its owners' name?

The "Under the Counter" those Englanders have leased us is "a comedy with music" written around Cicely Courtneidge and a telephone.

Both instruments are on-stage throughout the evening; neither is silent from curtain rise to curtain fall. And, when the two act up together, Britannia waives the rules of lend-lease and fair play.

Even with a line of "Oh What a Beautiful Morning" thrown in, all of "Under the Counter," including Cicely Courtneidge, isn't worth one scene of "Oklahoma" without a single star.

And Miss Courtneidge is, as programs say, "the idolized darling" of English music hall and shows with songs and dances. A commoner's Beatrice Lillie, as it were . . .

Well, there'll always be an England—for her to go back to!

• • •

Sickly Bit of Stuff

What dialogue-writer Arthur Macrae means by "a comedy with music" is a sickly bit of would-be funny stuff with occasional shots-in-the-arm of songs and dances. Neither the songs, by Harold Purcell and Manning Sherwin, nor the dances, by Jack Hulbert and John Gregory, are helpful. But, either sung or danced, "The Moment I Saw You" is superior to the others.

And the story, as I remember it, deals with a lady called Jo Fox.

If seeing is believing, Jo is an idolized darling of English comedies with songs and dances who holds dress rehearsals in her house in London, carrying, from room to room, her costumed chorus with her. Every so often it breaks out in a song or dance routine.

The actress-into-Fox is, I gather, the right side of a triangle made up of herself, a composer known as Mike and a producer known as Tim. If I'm mistaken don't tell me. I honestly don't care. But, I do seem to remember that the producer known as Tim gets her in the end. Although a long time coming, you can see this ending from the start . . .

But to Jo, Mike and Tim it's a great surprise!

• • •

'Not for Me'

Let me straighten myself out on lend-lease's Miss Courtneidge. I know that she's the daughter of Robert Courtneidge, the English actor, that she hasn't been on Broadway since "By the Way" in 1925, that she's been called "the funniest actress on the London stage," that she's married to the Jack Hulbert who directed her present vehicle, that—

I know that she's the commoner's Beatrice Lillie and that the commoner's Beatrice Lillie is a high and handsome designation. But I also know that Miss Courtneidge is most certainly not for me.

Not as the over-worked human peg on which to hang so lumpish a song-and-dance show as "Under the Counter" turns out to be. Miss Lillie herself couldn't carry it.

Among the principals at the Shubert, seven are originals. These are Winifred Hindle, Francis Roberts, Thorley Walters, George Street, Glen Alyn, Frederick Farley and, of course, Miss Courtneidge.

And the most missed original is Hartley Power, who was Sir Alec Dunne and remained at home to play the Paul Douglas role in the London version of "Born Yesterday" . . .

"Under the Counter"! Perfidious Albion, take it away!

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 4, 1947

A Bombshell at the Shubert

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Under the Counter" jigs around the stage of the Shubert like a relic of the '20s when dozens of small-scale musicals were cashing in on the boom.

Its loose-jointedness, its posing chorus and its punchy enthusiasm suggest that time stood still.

The chief difference is that in those days anyone who could kick over her head and had a vocal range of four notes might turn up as star. This operation is built around Cicely Courtneidge, a stellar attraction in Britain for several decades.

Nothing Daunts Cicely.

There is no one in the American theater quite like Miss Courtneidge. Nothing daunts here, any more in the open air it might daunt Babe Didrickson.

Her energy makes Patsy Kelly look like an imitation of a pussy willow. She can comb her hair faster than Hildegarde, walk faster than Eleanora Sears ever did, and outmug Sheila Barrett when she is of the mind to.

Her vertebrae operate like the beads on an abacus, and there have never been more violent takes. She sings, she dances, she clowns and she emotes.

Traditional advice to legitimate payers attempting vaudeville used to be to get the audience quick. Miss Courtneidge enters with all guns blazing, and pretty nearly three hours later not a station is wanting for ammunition.

She Runs the Show.

The whole show is thrown to her. In retrospect, it seems that there was only one brief interval when she was offstage. The rest of the time she changed costumes behind chorus girls.

"Under the Counter" gives a general impression of reviewing the whole music hall repertoire of the star, and much of the time it would be simpler to take if she was doing a single.

According to the book she is an actress, and little further explanation is given for the interpolated musical numbers or the chorus girls who were apparently checked out in the hall for the several days' duration of the plot.

The title refers to the black market proclivities of the actress. She has a wangle for everything from a leg of lamb to 60 yards of stair carpet. An old beau who would be an ideal producer for her new show is the current victim of her string pulling. By appleasing to prominent government members she has him removed from his post in Paris, slated for Burma, and landed in London.

Just a Backdrop.

All this is only important as a backdrop for Miss Courtneidge, whose sheer vitality barely gives anyone else on stage time to feed her lines.

The show is tweaked now and then with some remarkably languid dance routines. Their salvation is that they are trotted through by some very handsome gals.

Of the other actors, who in this case can hardly be called principals, Thorley Walters, Ballard Berkeley, Wilfrid Hyde White and Glen Alyn are in there pitching.

Miss Courtneidge is undisputed titleholder: Miss Bentidrene 1947.

"Music in My Heart"

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 3, 1947

'Music in My Heart' Is All Corn

By ROBERT COLEMAN

They sprouted enough corn on the stage of the Adelphi Theatre last evening to relieve the European food shortage as Henry Duffy gave operetta another blackeye with a musical bowwow called "Music in My Heart."

This tedious offering purported to be based on the life and works of P. I. Tchaikovsky. The book by Patsy Ruth Miller has the Russian music master falling in love with a glamorous diva, who jilts him for a handsome officer from Imperial Court.

Tchaikovsky probably wished that he had been jilted by the singer, for she actually snared him into marriage and then made his life miserable. He wasn't cut out for romance and matrimony anyway.

And Tchaikovsky would doubtless have welcomed the fatal cholera germs sooner had he known to what ends his biography and music were going to be put last night. Had he heard the pedestrian performance of his works, as reshaped for the occasion by Franz Steininger and Forman Brown, he would have rushed to Borodin's laboratory and started test tubes.

The only praiseworthy vocalizing of the evening came from Charles Fredericks, who clicked as Ravenal in the last revival of "Show Boat." He has an excellent voice and knows how to use it.

Martha Wright and Della Lind would benefit by visits to a first rate teacher, but they are easy on the eyes.

Vivienne Segal and Jan Murray waste their time on some outrageous hoke. Miss Segal and Evelyn Herbert were the two greatest operetta prima donnas of our time. How she must snicker up her sleeve as she listens to present-day incompetents manhandle music. No, Viv wouldn't snicker. She's too kind for that. But she could heave a sigh or two of discouragement.

There are ballet interludes by Ruth Page that are travesties on toeshoe terpsichore. The major item features Olga Suarez and Nicolas Magallanes. Miss Suarez is no ball of fire as a ballerina. Magallanes, usually a reliable partner, had some trouble handling her.

Shows staged by Hassard Short are noted for taste. "Music in My Heart," however, seems to have gotten him down, as it did us, for Bobby will draw no posies in the drama year books for his labors on this crude and tasteless sample of Indian maize on the cob.

'MUSIC IN MY HEART.'

Musical play with melodies of Tchaikovsky; book by Patsy Ruth Miller; lyrics by Forman Brown; music adapted by Franz Steininger; choreography by Ruth Page; musical director, Franz Steininger; scenery and costumes by Alvin Colt; staged and lighted by Hassard Short; presented by Henry Duffy at the Adelphi Theater Thursday evening, October 2, 1947. The cast:

Stage manager.....Harold Norman
Tatiana Korokaya.....Vivienne Segal
Mischa.....George Lambrose
Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky.....Robert Carroll
Stage doorman.....Allan Lowell
Desiree Artot.....Martha Wright
Maurice Cabanne.....Jan Murray
Capt. Nicholas Gregorovitch, Charles Fredericks
Ivan Petrofski.....James Starbuck
Natiucha.....Dorothy Etheridge
Gypsy.....Jean Handzlik
Joseph.....Robert Hayden
Princess Katherine Dolgoruki, Della Lind
Olga.....Pauline Goddard
Messenger of the Tsar.....Edward White
Sonya.....Joanna Shelby
Vera Remisova.....Olga Suarez
Lord Chamberlain.....Ralph Glover
Prima ballerina.....Olga Suarez
Premier danseur.....Nicholas Magallanes

SYNOPSIS: SCENES. Act I. Scene 1a, Ballet Rehearsal. b.Stage of Odeon Theater, St. Petersburg. Scene 2, the Cafe Samovar a few weeks later. Act II. Scene 1, Nikki's Country House a month later. Scene 2, road to St. Petersburg that night. Scene 3, foyer of Imperial Opera House a few weeks later. Scene 4, stage of Imperial Opera House a few minutes later. Scene 5, backstage at Imperial Opera House.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 3, 1947

'Music in My Heart' Is A Melange of Cliches

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Music in My Heart" represents one of the greatest research jobs in the history of the theater. There is not an original idea in it.

The score is richly melodic, frankly adapted from the works of Tchaikovsky. Unfortunately there is not a singing personality in the cast. The closest is Vivienne Segal, who has next to nothing to sing. Despite this she stopped the performance last night with a frighteningly trite lyric about a ballerina; stopped it until she could convey to the audience that there were no more verses to sing.

Come to think of it Miss Segal must be thinking during the performance that she has done this show about 12,000 times before, but she continues to be bright, alert and sure of style.

Charles Fredericks makes the biggest vocal contribution of the evening, singing clearly and easily as the winning rival of the composer. He looks more like an Army fullback than a Russian playboy of the 60s.

As the unromantically unlucky Tchaikovsky, Robert Carroll comes across as the only dimensional character in this madrigal meet. He does not sing, but he plays some fine melodramatic piano.

Martha Wright was only recently awarded the role of the prima donna these gentlemen both love. She sings pleasantly once she gets warmed up, but is by no means yet a limber or resourceful enough actress for such a leading role.

Recently the comedian Jan Murray has been in the habit of working as a single. He can be very funny. Here he seems to have suddenly discovered he was on the stage with lots of other people, and to feel nervously under obligation to be all of them.

Della Lind is the decorative royalty that always figures in this kind of operetta.

The startling thing about the book of "Music in My Heart" is not that it is dull. With music like this, the book is conventionally something to be ignored. In this case each line of dialogue foretells its response with the infallibility of a Grade One Reader. The utter absence of plot is one thing, but the lack of conversational suspense is sustained genius.

Hassard Short keeps a big cast moving around the stage with a facility that quite makes you forget nothing is happening. As always he lights the show with richness and dispatch, and Alvin Colt has done well by it with scenes and costumes.

In a number described as Danse Arabe, Pauline Goddard performs some startlingly libidinous choreography that is a masterpiece of insinuation. The other dancing is pretty routine. The "Beauty and the Beast" ballet is exquisite in color but otherwise uninteresting.

The show presents a multitude of Tchaikovsky scores, and all of them are recognizable even to the listener who cannot specifically identify them. There is no effort to syncopate them beyond recognition, and no single melody is plugged to death.

Herald Tribune (New York)

OCTOBER 3, 1947

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Russian Sleigh Ride

THIS report will start happily with the news that "Music in My Heart," the operetta which has come to the Adelphi Theater, has a brilliant and haunting score. Interpolated and adapted Tchaikovsky melodies give an impressive tonal background to this first musical show of the season. Beyond that borrowed dignity, the Henry Duffy production has very little to recommend it. There are some handsome settings by Hassard Short, to be sure, personable singers and passable ballet numbers in a song-and-dance biography of the great Russian composer. On the debit side are ungainly lyrics by Forman Brown, a two-dimensional book by Patsy Ruth Miller and a woeful lack of dramatic conviction.

* * *

The work deals, in ponderous platitudes, with Tchaikovsky's ill-fated romance with Desiree Artot. In a curious blend of stately scenes and slapstick nonsense, it attempts to give theatrical statement to artistic creation. Robert Carroll, in the part of the composer, dashes off fragments of symphonies and operas to accompany the action. Since most of the music has been extensively pirated by Tin Pan Alley already, it is more reminiscent than satisfying with its ridiculous lyrical and terpsichorean elaborations. Like Grieg, in "Song of Norway," an eminent musicmaker gets short shrift in a musical melange.

* * *

There has been no penny-pinching in this musical pageant. A large cast is headed by a dozen principals, of whom Martha Wright, as Mlle. Artot, and Charles Fredericks, in the part of the dashing Captain Nicholas Gregorovitch, who woos the lady away from his composer friend, give the best account of themselves. They have stage presence and sing with authority, even in the absurd "Song of the Troika," which should give Hollywood the cue for a horse opera musical, with Tchaikovsky or Bach as the tune writer. Vivienne Segal plays it easy as a ballet mistress, who avers that that is the only kind of mistress she can still be, and Della Lind is haughty as all get-out as a princess who competes with the heroine for Nikki's adulation.

* * *

Jan Murray has a much rougher assignment as Desiree's manager, having to put on funny costumes to get an occasional titter. As for the dancing Pauline Goddard does a writhing sort of strip-tease which is startling, to say the least, in an account of flaming genius and Olga Suarez and Nicholas Magallanes acquit themselevs with precision as the leaders of the ballet. There are a lot of scenes and a lot of songs in "Music in My Heart," given pleasant backgrounds by Short, but they add up to no more than a tedious exploitation of memorable music.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 3, 1947

Evening of Old Hat

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Let us hope that Tchaikovsky is not an easy grave-whirler. For the uses to which his scores have been put in "Music in My Heart" might set him to some furious spinning and thumping. As presented at the Adelphi last evening, it is stock operetta in the "Blossom Time" tradition, with pasteboard romance, uncomfortable comedy, some hushed genuflections toward royalty and conventional suggestions of musical comedy lechery.

"Ah, Paris, what memories it holds for me!" sighs the mistress of the St. Petersburg (Leningrad) Ballet with random intimations of naughty revelry. The romantic raptures are equally moth-eaten. When Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky sees Desirée Artot for the first time, he speaks with the originality of a librettist: "She's lovely . . . like a flower," he murmurs with a dying inflection. These hastily scribbled notes from a full evening of old hat give you a quick notion of the genre, which hurried out of fashion with "Of Thee I Sing" and "Brigadoon."

* * *

Only a musical scholar could give you an accurate report of this operetta's exact musicology. When the curtain is down, which is none too frequently, a good orchestra plays Tchaikovsky well, and even a theatregoer can enjoy it. When the curtain is up some very bewildering things occur aloud—sometimes with complete melodies from the old master and sometimes with his themes bursting through less-celebrated bombast. If Tchaikovsky wrote all those song numbers, he must have been living under greater strain than had been realized. The cultural level of "Music In My Heart" may be gauged by some of the lyrical song titles—"No! No! No!," "Gossip" and "Three's a Crowd," which Tchaikovsky no doubt plagiarized from the popular Broadway revue of the same title.

Shoddy as the taste of "Music in My Heart" is, it has its virtues. One of them is Martha Wright, the soprano. She at least appreciates the quality of last night's principal composer, and she has the voice and the training to put glory into the music she is singing. Jean Handzlik, a sultry contralto with a bell-like voice, sings "The Balalaika Serenade" with authentic, as distinguished from synthetic, passion. Charles Fredericks is cast as the great lover, which is trying for him and for us, but he has an excellent baritone voice which he could probably use better if anyone cared. Vivienne Segal, whose talents are wasted on a silly part, has one of Tchaikovsky's loveliest melodies to sing and some of the most odious lyrics.

* * *

Towards the end of the evening this grab-bag Tchaikovsky gets around to a ballet where the music is respected. As a whole, the ballet troupe is indifferent. But Olga Suarez and Nicholas Magallanes dance the principal roles beautifully. Nothing these individual singers and dancers can do alters the general impression that "Music In My Heart" has succeeded in debasing some of the grandest music the world has inherited. Even the radio and the juke-boxes give Tchaikovsky more honorable treatment.

New York Post

OCTOBER 3, 1947

A Dull Musical Glimpse At a Great Composer

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

There must be some less painful way for the drama to pay tribute to the great composers than these pseudo-romantic operettas of the "Blossom Time" school. Last night at the Adelphi Theatre they got around to poor Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky, and, although the intention was undoubtedly to do him honor, its effect was, as usual, to reduce the great man to pigmy proportions. I suppose "Music in My Heart" was no worse than the previous examples of its school, but it certainly did little to add to either the composer's fame or the new theatrical season.

All of the cliches were present, from the hero's love affair with the opera singer, through the tribute from royalty (it is the Czar this time), to the scene of the broken-heart, when the love-lorn composer sits down tragically at the piano and writes his masterpiece. Despite some of the efforts of the lyric writer, the Tchaikovsky melodies are not seriously injured and are the one glory of the evening, but the price to pay for them in sheer boredom is too great.

The Comedy

Then there is the comedy, which, to indulge in a triumph of understatement, is no better than it should be. It is carried on chiefly by a hapless comic named Jan Murray, who is in danger of winning some sort of prize for the least funny performance of the season. I would not be so bitter about the humor if it didn't entangle Vivienne Segal in its hideous toils. Miss Segal, as every one who saw her in the memorable "Pal Joey" will recall eternally, is a delightful musical comedy actress, and it is a shame to waste her on such antics.

As the final insult to Tchaikovsky he isn't even the central figure of the narrative, save nominally. Chiefly what story there is has to do with a dashing rake of an officer named Captain Nicholas Gregorovich, and his romantic misadventures. He is the fellow who wins the opera singer Tchaikovsky loves, after a merry courtship which includes a dash through the snow in a troika just to make everything properly Russian (Romanoff period). You must not, however, blame the Captain for stealing the composer's girl, since it provides the nominal hero with his one big scene.

Inspiration

Up to that point Robert Carroll, who plays Tchaikovsky, has to dress in drab clothes and stand in a corner, in the melancholy fashion characteristic of great composers in these operettas, looking wistful and artistic. Once jilted, though, and the center of the stage is his for the sad but brave ending. Then Mr. Carroll is able to act to his heart's content, showing great nobility of spirit until inspiration brightens his tragic features, and you leave him alone with his piano, knowing that a masterpiece is about to be born.

This strangely tedious nonsense has a lavish production and a few earnest ballets, as well as the required episode where the gypsies sing and play. Charles Fredericks, who was Ravenal, the noble gambler, in the revival of "Show Boat," is a beaming Captain Gregorovich. Martha Wright and Della Lind look and sing well as the operatic heroine and the Captain's jealous ex-mistress, respectively, and the evening, as I may have hinted, struck me as a bore.

The Sun

OCTOBER 3, 1947

'Music in My Heart' Offers Lifeless Book, Fine Music, Handsome Production.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Such world figures as Grieg, Chopin, Strauss and Schubert have been placed upon our song and dance stage with varying results, and now the Broadway theater discovers Tschaikowsky via "Music in My Heart," which brought first-nighters scurrying last night to the Adelphi. Perhaps they shouldn't have bothered.

If there must be musical plays based on incidents in the lives of great composers—and apparently it's a procession that will go on forever—this new "Music in My Heart" is considerably better than some others that have come this way. It is handicapped by one of those dreary books that seem to be inevitable with this sort of show, but it has some assets here and there.

The Tschaikowsky melodies provide a generally delightful score. The production is good looking, the costumes are bright, and such singers as Charles Fredericks and Martha Wright do well with the songs. And Hassard Short, a man of valiant deeds as a director for the spectacle-plays of this town, has helped the production pictorially. It's too bad that good directors don't also write books.

"Music in My Heart" is another piece in which a great composer appears as a character in the proceedings, with his melodies (arranged by Franz Steininger) providing the music for the evening. Tschaikowsky (Peter Ilich Tschaikowsky, 1840-1893) is honored by the Czar upon the stage of the Adelphi, but in Patsy Ruth Miller's book he comes out a loser romantically. The prima donna to whom he gives his heart turns him down for a soldier.

Martha Wright, assigned to the role of the prima donna when changes were being made every hour or so during the Philadelphia tryout, gives a good account of herself. Vivienne Segal, who can be very wry and dry when somebody writes the right words for her, struggles to give a chuckle to the lifeless book. Jan Murray is also burdened with the supposedly humorous portions of Miss Miller's libretto. Olga Suarez and Nicholas Magallanes bring their magic to the evening's ballet.

Henry Duffy, who has played theater everywhere from San Diego to Scranton, is now trying New York with this production of "Music in My Heart." It isn't in the same world with "Song of Norway" but it is somewhat better than such exhibits as "Polonaise" and "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston."

To sum up, "Music in My Heart" has a lovely score, a book that it tormentingly dull, and it is a show that is generally lifeless. And if Henry Duffy gets his money back it will be a miracle.

PM Exclusive

OCTOBER 5, 1947

Kronenberger

A Really Awful Operetta On Tchaikowsky's Life

For some years now Peter Ilych Tchaikowsky has been slowly rebuilding a reputation destroyed through no fault of his own. Thanks to soupy and saccharine performances of his work, thanks also to the snobbish idea that anyone so easy to like just couldn't be worth liking, an admirable composer and great master of melody had been condescended to, by the fancy folk, when he was not being straight-out cut dead. But in recent years such attitudes have all but vanished, and Tchaikowsky has come back into style and public esteem.

* * *

And now, when after a slow uphill fight he had reached the peak again, the poor fellow has been rolled downhill in a spiked barrel; has been hurled over the precipice; and then been picked up, bleeding and broken, and shoved down the cistern. The doings at the Adelphi Theater Thursday night were too sheerly idiotic to be regarded as obscene; but they made it impossible for Broadway to cast a single stone at Hollywood for any cinematic sacrilege whatever; or to refer to a soap opera except in terms of the very highest respect.

Indeed, the Spartan simplicity of a soap opera is something to welcome after the high-heaped Czarist grandeurs of *Music in My Heart*. One reason, indeed, why this is the most stupefying of the Lives-of-Great-Composers operettas is that it is the most sumptuous; and thus has the most chances to go wrong on the biggest scale. And so far as I can see, it hasn't muffed a single chance. Given the choice of two or more ways of being trite, it unerringly picks the tritest. Given the choice of two or more ways of being trashy, it unfailingly plumps for the trashiest. Does it want the most inappropriate setting possible for a Tchaikowsky tune, or the vulgarist lyrics? – they materialize instantly, as though a magician had waved his wand. Does it seek the sickest witticism that six continents can provide? – straightaway *She* remarks: "I've been a prima ballerina since I was 16"; and *He* replies: "Prima ballerina! Why I thought you were a dancer."

* * *

The constant guffawing in Thursday night's audience was less, I think, the laughter of contempt than the laughter of incredulity. The time came when you started to mutter at the stage, when you started to say, "I *dare* you to have snow start falling during the Troika Scene" – and, by God, they took your dare; when you next muttered, "I *dare* you to use the big first-movement theme of the *Pathetique* as a love duet" – and by God, they took your dare again; when you said a third time, "I dare you. I really dare you, to have Tchaikowsky, after he loses the girl, moon around for a bit and then start ripping the guts out of his concert grand." And, by God, they took that dare, too.

But with that, the evening was over. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal American

OCTOBER 3, 1947

Tchaikovsky's Life A Plodding Operetta

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night's "Music In My Heart" is still another of those operettas the melodies of which you whistle as you enter the theatre. This time the melody-maker is Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky. And, at the Adelphi, his fine familiar melodies are the best things to be found. Would that there were more of them!

For when those fine familiar melodies are neglected, "Music In My Heart" is no theatre piece about which to write a rave review. With the kindest reception the East Coast can see fit to give it, this West Coast production owes such allure as it may possess to the non-Californian called Tchaikovsky.

What's more, his fine familiar melodies aren't as melodious as they should be in the orchestrations of Franz Steininger and the vocalizations of the principals. Not until the "Beauty and the Beast" Ballet arrives does Peter Ilych enter into his melody-making own . . .

That's late in a long-drawn October offering.

• • •

Plodding Libretto

You've guessed that "Music In My Heart" is one more biographical operetta written around the life of its hero-composer. So far, without too much after-midnight research, Franz Peter Schubert and Edvard Hagerup Grieg seem to have been the major victims of this gruesome business.

And now it's Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky who wanders in and out of "Music In My Heart," writing, playing and even singing his fine familiar melodies as he moons pictorially over the Desiree Ariot about whom he never gave a hang. Older than he, she married, as they say, another.

At the Adelphi, as Patsy Ruth Miller's lackluster libretto plods its pedestrian way from the "Waltz of the Flowers" to the ballet music for "Beauty and the Beast," last night's "romantic musical play" is most bearable when the Tchaikovsky music is permitted to sound off on its own.

Singers especially just don't seem to like it.

• • •

A Languid Lover

A graduate of "The Lost Colony" School of Outdoor Acting in North Carolina, Robert Carroll is a long and languid lover who plays a mean piano and sings a sad Tchaikovsky song well off key. If he's not the Peter Ilych of those letters to his brother, he's not the Peter Ilych Antoniana Ivanovna Milyoukov married, either.

Martha Wright, one of those from - understudy - to - leading-lady legends, is seen and heard as the Desiree Ariot who marries, as they still say, another. Charles Fredericks is the "another" Desiree Ariot marries. But it's the Gypsy of Jean Handzlik's "Balalaika Serenade" who's the first performer of the California entry.

Every so often Vivienne Segal shows up in "Music In My Heart" and, as Tatiana Karskaya, dirties up the story. With her is Jan Murray who, as Maurice Cabanne, also kind of queers it. And, in the "Beauty and the Beast" ballet, Olga Suarez and Nicholas Magallanes are in evidence. And featured . . . .

Frankly, Tchaikovsky is not himself at the Adelphi!

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 3, 1947

'Music in My Heart' Takes Tunes By Tschaikowsky and Ruins Them

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I got an idea. All we have to do is dig up some money some place, which should be easy, and we do an operetta. It will be about how Harry S. Truman wins the Democratic nomination at the convention next June, and all we need to do is hire us a lyric writer and set it to the music of the late Stephen Foster. It will be as good as "Music in My Heart." Maybe better.

"Music in My Heart" was presented last evening at the Adelphi Theatre as a belated tribute to the late Peter I. Tschaikowsky, a snowbound Russian who managed to write some of the loveliest and most tropical melodies in the catalogues of G. Schirmer, I. Witmark, G. Ricordi and I. Berlin. It was a frosted nosegay.

You know by now how people take somebody who is in public domain, write a loused-up story of his life and sanctimoniously swipe his music. The best job of this kind ever done was "Blossom Time," which was about the late Franz Schubert. The newest is "Music in My Heart."

Some Good Dances.

Here and there in this musical are some attractive things, like a "Beauty and the Beast" ballet, which is played straight and danced nicely by Olga Suarez and Nicholas Magellanes. There are pleasant singers like Charles Fredericks and Martha Wright, and some interesting dance numbers staged by Ruth Page. But that's about all.

The plot is about how P. I. Tschaikowsky (played by Robert Carroll) meets a girl from France who can sing, so he sits down at the piano and knocks off a lifetime's work for her in an hour or two. Hassard Short has staged the enterprise as though he had been engaged by the late Mme. Tussaud.

I should like to call a halt on biographies of composers until such time as they can be made truly biographical, and not flimsy excuses for getting good tunes for free. And if anybody is to be allowed to pilfer great music and monkey with it, that person must be Walt Disney. In "Fantasia" Mr. Disney used taste and imagination in picturing Tschaikowsky's "Nutcracker Suite." Remember the dancing mushrooms?

Well, there aren't any mushrooms at the Adelphi Theatre. I am sorry to have got so upset about all this, and herewith offer my apologies to Henry Duffy, the producer of "Music in My Heart."

"Command Decision"

New York Post

OCTOBER 2, 1947

Drama of Air Force Brilliantly Done

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The widespread suspicion that there is popular feeling against dramas dealing with the late war should be effectively dissipated by William Wister Haines' "Command Decision," which opened at the Fulton Theatre last night. It is true that a couple of seasons ago Harry Brown's "A Sound of Hunting," a war play of unusual distinction, was a box-office failure, but it was a year or two ahead of its time, and, with all its virtues, it was perhaps a bit lacking in emotional appeal. The new work is not only a taut, dramatic and completely believable wartime narrative, but carries with it enough heartfelt emotion to make it a stirring, persuasive and satisfying play.

If "Command Decision" does not prove to be successful in the theatre, both writers and producers may just as well give up the idea of a war drama for the season. If, however, it succeeds as handsomely as I firmly believe it will, it should be cheering to remember that this is not because it does anything about giving its subject a trace of nostalgic glamor. Even "What Price Glory," the finest and bitterest play about men in battle ever written, had a curiuos touch of romantic excitement mixed with its grim, disillusioned spirit. "Command Decision," for all its dramatic power, never loses sight of the fact that war is just the horrible, tedious, dirty business of killing.

This admirable quality is all the more remarkable because the play deals with the American Air Force, which does have a way of glamorizing itself. Mr. Haines is filled with the conviction that air power is invincible, and he appears to have all the flier's belief in the superiority of his branch of the service to the more primitive forms of combat. But his study of a stern and forthright brigadier general commanding a bombardment division is the realistic study of a sensitive specialist in death.

The central figure of "Command Decision" is Brigadier General K. C. Dennis, who is looked on as little better than a mass murderer by the war correspondents and the higher echelons back home. He is bent on wiping out by daylight precision bombing three factories far beyond fighter protection in the interior of Germany, where it is known that a new and dangerous type of jet bomber is being built. Although the old-time Air Force Major General above him knows the tremendous importance of what he is doing, his fear of the politicians and public sentiment keeps him from backing up his unpopular subordinate.

Chiefly Mr. Haines' play is a drama of character, and one of the finest things about it is the manner in which it makes clear the viewpoints of its three leading figures. The author has a skillful way of making all of them seem at first unsympathetic — the brigadier general with his conviction that all of his men are expendable; the veteran of the early days of the Air Force, who has grown stuffy uncertain and political-minded with the years; the ambitious desk officer who thinks he wants a combat command—and then explaining them sympathetically with fine dramatic understanding.

If the play is completely believable in all its phases, it is because not only has Mr. Haines written it understandingly, but John O'Shaughnessy has staged it brilliantly and every one of the parts is perfectly cast. Paul Kelly, always an actor of honesty and power, gives a superb portrayal of the hard-driving Dennis. Jay Fassett as the air-force bureaucrat and Paul McGrath as the ambitious desk officer are excellent, and there are particularly fine performances in smaller roles by James Whitmore as a humorous and understanding technical sergeant, Stephen Elliott as an officer who goes to his death over the German target, Lewis Martin as an intelligence officer and Paul Ford as a pompous Congressman. "Command Decision" is so understanding a play that even its war correspondent is a sympathetic figure.

"COMMAND DECISION"

Play by William Wister Haines; directed by John O'Shaughnessy; setting and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Julia Rae; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Fulton Theater, Wednesday evening, October 1, 1947. The cast:

Tech. Sgt. Harold Evans.....James Whitmore
War correspondent Elmer Brockhurst.....Edmon Ryan
Brig-Gen. K. C. Dennis.....Paul Kelly
Capt. Lucius Jenks.....Arthur Franz
Col. Ernest Haley.....Edward Binns
Major Bolding Davis.....Robert Pike
Major-Gen. Roland Goodlew Kane.....Jay Fassett
Brig.-Gen. Clifton C. Garnett.....Paul McGrath
Major Homer Prescott.....William Layton
Col. Edward Martin.....Stephen Elliott
Lt. Jake Goldberg.....John Randolph
Major Desmond Lansing.....Lewis Martin
Enlisted armed guard.....West Hooker
Major Rufus Dayhuff.....Walter Black
Mr. Arthur Malcolm.....Paul Ford
Mr. Oliver Stone.....Frank McNellis
N. C. O. photographer.....Leonard Patrick
Captain G. W. C. Lee.....James Holden

SYNOPSIS—The entire action of the play takes place in the office of Brigadier General K. C. Dennis at the Headquarters of the 5th American Bombardment Division, Heavy, in England. Act I. About 4 p. m. on a Saturday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. About 10 p. m. the same evening. Scene 2. Sunday noon, the following day. Act III. Sunday, the same day. About 8 p. m.

Journal American

OCTOBER 2, 1947

The 'Journey's End' Of World War II?

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's no need to wonder about "Command Decision" which, after roadside workouts in Princeton and Baltimore, came last night into the Fulton and took the audience by storm. As I left the pleasant playhouse on 46th st., first-nighters were acclaiming William Wister Haines' document in dialogue with encore after encore after encore.

As the curtain rose and fell and rose again, the 18 players—every mother's son of them—were taking their well-earned bows. And Paul Kelly, the evening's performer among performers, was making a curtain speech that was as short as it was inaudible to this theatrical leg man, hurrying happily to his dead line.

No, there's no need for anyone to wonder about "Command Decision." For Mr. Haines, as novelist into soldier into playwright, has written his piece because he wanted to. Because he had to, maybe. His behind the lines report on the Fifth American Bombardment Division, Heavy, is made more in anger than in sorrow.

And more in a sort of firm but disillusioned faith than either.

Soldier's View

As novelist into soldier into playwright, William Wister Haines' approach to the problem of war in general—and World War II in particular—is that of the professional soldier. "Command Decision" is the late lamentable conflict as seen through the unflinching eyes of Brigadier General K. C. Dennis, Fifth Bombardment Division somewhere in England.

Casey, as they call him, finds it necessary to expend hundreds of valuable young lives to attain one essential military objective. He loathes the obligation. But, as a professional soldier, he's clear thinking, indomitable and resolute. A man of action, he'll do what's right as he, not the Pentagon Building, sees it.

The personal struggle in which Casey Dennis becomes involved is the two-edged conflict of the play, building through three acts and four scenes into a climax of intensity and power. Mr. Haines has pointed out that there's nothing definitely documentary in the disturbing implications of his people and his play.

But, to my way of thinking, they're too real to be untrue!

Kelly at Best

At any rate, Paul Kelly is an inspired choice for the demanding role of the Brigadier General K. C. Dennis who may—or may not—be founded on the reality of William Wister Haines' trans-Atlantic recollections. In or out of the Hollywoods, no living actor could give a performance worthier than his. Not once does it fail or falter.

And, although Jay Fassett and Paul McGrath are rightly featured as a major and brigadier general, respectively, it's James Whitmore who ranks these secondary words of praise for his Technical Sergeant Harold Evans. And James Holden for the muck-and-magnolia rightness of his Captain George Washington Custis Lee.

But, under the producing banner of Kermit Bloomgarden and the directing banner of John O'Shaughnessy, the hand-picked cast does more than well by William Wister Haines' document in dialogue. It may not be a great play Mr. Haines has written, but it's a fine and fearless portrait of democracy at war, finely and fearlessly presented...

"Command Decision" well may be the "Journey's End" of World War II.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 2, 1947

Drama of Army Brass Has Wallop

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is importance, tight vitality and emotional impact in "Command Decision." It illuminates a human side of war which may never have occurred to anyone who has never been in one.

Beyond that this study of authority and its devastating effect on people crytallizes an equation which in some degree confronts every endeavor.

The play shows how a man can seem dogged, ruthless and inhumane when he is agonized at what he is doing. To sustain the long view of accomplishment, he suppresses every normal charity to demand of himself a clear aim at the big victory.

Has One Objective.

Because the man has acquired a hard-bought, rigid claim on foresight, he cannot brook the selfish intrusion that would destroy his objective. He is impatient, justifiably, but tactlessly rude under stress.

When his taut insistence added to circumstances may emasculate his mission, it is recognition of his own desperate sacrifice that saves it.

Gen. Dennis is called a "Fascist megalomaniac" for sending bombers beyond fighter escort range. They are destroying factories for jets which he knows can soon ruin Allied air power.

He is tortured by the loss of men, but demands of himself an inhuman concentration on the ultimate economy.

Protects Own Position.

His most logical opposition is his older commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Kane. From decades of fighting for air strength he has learned the necessity of considering Congress and public opinion. He is also an artist at overtly protecting his own position.

Gen. Dennis' most maddening hindrance is a pompous member of an investigating committee from the House of Representatives.

Under pressure and with tired wisdom, Gen. Kane halts the mission. Gen. Dennis frankly blackmails his permission to proceed, by halting the court-martial of a decorated coward from the visiting Congressman's state.

Removed from Command.

When this move fails and he is removed from command, his successor for the first time learns the magnitude of Gen. Dennis' courage.

Haines' play has a military clip about it, dispensing with any trace of sentimentality and powerful with masculine emotion. Its humor is robust, salty and intrinsic.

There are a couple of scenes that might have been less visually static, but the speeches in them are rich with ideas vital to the spirit of the play.

Paul Kelly is splendid as the practical visionary of the play. It is a role of emotional layers rather than facets. He reveals the complex courage of the man with authority and understanding.

Penetrating Portrait.

Jay Fasset as Gen. Kane gives a similarly penetrating portrait of a man for whom time has overbalanced boldness with expediency.

Over all it is an excellent cast that Kermit Bloomgarden has assembled. Even the bits take on real personality.

Of the more outstanding contributors to this moving performance are Paul McGrath as the succeeding General, James Whitmore as the canny Sergeant, Stephen Elliott as a pilot and Arthur Franz as the inflated coward. Edmon Ryan is a logically annoying correspondent, and shorter roles are clearly delineated by Edward Binns, William Layton, John Randolph, Lewis Martin, Paul Ford and James Holden.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 2, 1947

A Superb War Drama, 'Command Decision,' Is Beautifully Staged

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There was a good deal of saluting at the Fulton Theatre last evening because the play there is about some generals and majors; but it is nothing compared to the saluting which this civilian is about to begin.

"Command Decision," by William Wister Haines, is THE drama about World War II—a wide-open, four-in its impact with the two memorable dramas of World War I, "What Price Glory?" and "Journey's End."

The salutes will start with William Wister Haines, an Eighth Air Force veteran and a novelist. Mr. Haines wrote "Command Decision" as a play and later, at the behest of his publisher, converted it into a novel which has sold quite well. His play is going to sell better—much better; it got nineteen curtain calls last evening and earned them all.

The next salute goes to grim, gray Paul Kelly for a perfect performance. Mr. Kelly is one Brig. Gen. Dennis, commanding an American heavy bombardment division in England. You often have read what it feels like to be a commanding officer and send men out to be killed; now, in Mr. Kelly's taut and masterful performance, you can see what it feels like.

Two Fine Recruits.

From here on it becomes a little difficult to pick the target for the next salute, because everybody concerned with "Command Decision," from producer Kermit Bloomgarden on down, rates one. I'll pick two men because they are rookies who turn in veteran performances.

One is John O'Shaughnessy, a recruit from the Equity Library Theatre, who has directed the play with an unfalteringly sure instinct for pace, vigor, humor and tenderness. The other is James Whitmore, an ex-marine who once had a bit in a USO show. Mr. Whitmore portrays Mr. Kelly's personal sergeant—a cynical, conniving, outspoken and immensely loyal follower; and some other hopeful youngster is going to have to work very hard and get some good breaks to beat Mr. Whitmore out of my vote for the best performance by a newcomer this season.

"Command Decision" is a tough and realistic melodrama—but its toughness is strength of spirit, rather than the toughness that comes with the careless use of dirty words. There is no freehand cussing which some times passes for realism in military plays.

Crisp to the Last Line.

As commander of his heavy bomber group, Mr. Kelly makes the decision to have daylight raids on three jet-fighter factories deep in Germany, far beyond the range of fighter cover. One target has been obliterated, at tremendous loss of planes and crews; another has been missed, with even greater losses.

Now comes higher brass in the person of a major general; comes also a pair of congressmen for a look-see. The higher brass wants to play it safe and one of the statesmen is noisily appalled at wanton butchery. Dog-tired, harassed and heavy of heart, the commander of the bombers sticks to his purpose. He knows if the Germans get jet manufacture rolling in high they will regain air supremacy and may win the war.

The conflict which Mr. Haines has wrought beneath the ribbed arch of Mr. Kelly's Quonset headquarters is intense and believable. He manages to make one see the problems of the higher brass, too; his understanding is complete and his only real anger is directed at meddlesome and ignorant congressional junketeers.

"Command Decision" is as crisp as a corn flake right down to its excellent final line. Jay Fassett, as the higher brass; Paul McGrath, Arthur Franz, Stephen Elliott, John Randolph and Paul Ford are only some of the players who helped make the Fulton Theatre Broadway's most exciting spot last evening.

The Sun

OCTOBER 2, 1947

'Command Decision' Vigorous Air-force Play, Done by All-male Cast at Fulton.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Command Decision," an all-male drama of the Air Force in combat, is a talky, technical and extraordinarily vigorous play, the work of a new playwright, William Wister Haines. It has been well directed by John O'Shaughnessy and was brought into the tidy Fulton Theater last night by Kermit Bloomgarden.

This new "Command Decision" is peopled by generals, colonels, majors and captains, and it is crammed with a great mass of detail about missions, targets, enemy resistance, fighter protection, weather conditions and sickening figures on the loss of life that the aerial bombardments brought on. It's detail that frequently provides vibrant theater.

The author of the Fulton's play puts great emphasis on precision bombing as a vital factor in knocking Germany out of the war, and he writes of the part played by a fiery brigadier-general, one K. C. (Casey) Dennis, in command of a bombardment division (heavy) concentrating on jet plane installations in German soil.

Gen. Dennis doesn't believe in sending his bombers on milk runs. He piles attack upon attack and he knows that his enormous losses have to come. He is an emotional, agonized, driving and relentless commander, scornful of brass hats and interfering Congressmen. In sending forth his men on Operation Stitch an all-important target is missed. Another attack is ordered, notwithstanding the certainty of a concentration of German resistance. The casualties are severe and the squadron leader is lost. Political pressure on the major-general results in Dennis being relieved of his command. But just as he is ready to fly back home his orders are changed and he is sent to the Pacific. That can only mean a B-29 command. The Air Force knows its fighting generals, and Dennis is one of them.

"Command Decision" sags and lags occasionally, but the author has been uncommonly successful with his characterizations and Producer Bloomgarden has placed upon the stage of the Fulton actors who can play the parts.

Paul Kelly, a galvanic actor, has enormous force and drive as the Brigadier-General, always ready to tangle with the higher-ups. There's an excellent performance from Stephen Elliott as a Colonel who loses his life on a mission that he insisted on making, and certainly another from Jay Fassett, once a snarling desk sergeant in World War 1 (Camp Gordon, State of Georgia) and now playing a Major-General. He gives a fascinating recital of the early struggles to build up the American Air Force. James Whitmore is expellent as an outspoken technical sergeant; there are helpful performances from Paul McGrath, James Holden, John Randolph and Lewis Martin. And Paul Ford plays an unctuous, bumptious Congressman so well he must have once been one.

"Command Decision" is to be commended as an exceptionally good job of playwriting from a new dramatist who comes into the theater with a somewhat bewildering array of facts on the subject he projects. And so, with this play and "The Heiress," Broadway gets two rewarding evenings, and the week is only half done. Our theater is looking up.

PM EXCLUSIVE

OCTOBER 3, 1947

Broadway Finally Gets Its Teeth Into the War

Just when we had the right to begin expecting a really effective play about the war, it has come along. *Command Decision* is very effective indeed, in precisely the sense that the theater is effective. It puts on a good show which is all the better for being a serious one; it preserves a sense of excitement without sacrificing the ring of truth. It would be foolish to over-rate *Command Decision*, which is as far as possible from being a work of art; but it would be equally snobbish to underrate it. Considering that it could easily get by on its impact alone, we can be grateful that it displays a measure of insight as well.

• • •

Mr. Haines has written of the harassing and even harrowing responsibilities of war command—specifically of a brigadier-general in the Air Forces who, as he saw it, had to send appalling numbers of fliers to their deaths in order to expedite, or perhaps even safeguard, the winning of the war. To Gen. Dennis, the jet-plane factories deep inside Germany had to be wiped out before jet planes could take over the sky. The cost of it sickened his soul, but the necessity of it stiffened his will.

• • •

But Dennis had more than his own emotions to fight: he had the brass hats in the Pentagon Building with their conflicting theories; he had something called Public Opinion, that fired up when losses were heavy; he had Congressmen who arrived in all their ignorance to inspect, advise, and protest; he had all the politics of war against him, all the sentimentalities men use as shields against the unpleasant. Dennis' persistence, in the end, cost him his job. But his convictions gradually became those of his successor.

• • •

The conflict in *Command Decision* has all the plausibility of something that really happened; but better yet, it has all the interest of something that must happen again and again. Watching the play unfold, we realize once more that the only morality of war that matters is the morality of the war aims; and that what might be called the incidental humaneness of war is almost its cruelest irony. *Command Decision* has its sentimentalities, just as war itself does. But in its *attitude* toward war it is quite unsentimental.

• • •

In its attitude toward warriors, on the other hand, it is quite understanding: Mr. Haines has provided a varied collection of men in uniform, all of them pretty unbelievable and many of them interesting. The three most important—Gen. Dennis; Gen. Kane, the man who relieves him of his command; and Gen. Garnett, the man who succeeds him in it—are all nicely drawn, each of them becoming more sympathetic by virtue of becoming better understood. Thanks, indeed, to Mr. Haines' sense of people, and of their tempers and their tensions, *Command Decision* keeps its impact sharply human.

The play is by no means flawless: it drags in places and sprawls in others; at the end of Act II things happen too fast; toward the end of the play people say too much. But none of this gets very badly in the way because *Command Decision* is pitched at the level of good theater rather than fine drama. Of a different order of play we should certainly insist on greater leanness of form, reticence of speech, density of texture; here we are no more than momentarily bothered.

Command Decision has been given a good production. John O'Shaughnessy, in his first Broadway assignment, has directed the play very competently indeed, and been able to draw upon a very competent cast. As Gen. Dennis, Paul Kelly turns in an able and holding performance, while Jay Fawcett is generally excellent as one of the other generals, and Paul McGrath is good enough as the third. Stephen Elliott does very well in a smaller role, and James Whitmore serves up the juicy part of a technical sergeant to perfection.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

OCTOBER 2, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

None of the war plays has come to the point so sharply as "Command Decision," which was acted with tautness and precision at the Fulton last evening. Going back to the bombardment groups that blasted Germany before the invasion, William Wister Haines has looked into the tortured mind of a division commander and dramatized the agony involved in making decisions that would cost the lives of American crews.

As playmaking "Command Decision" is no great work of art, and remains faithful to the practicable formula. But Mr. Haines has written it audaciously out of an immense fund of knowledge about that grim mechanical, air force that flew the channel into Germany at a cost in American lives that could be mechanically reckoned. Expertly acted under the crisp direction of John O'Shaughnessy, "Command Decision" gives some stature to our early-season theatre.

• • •

Excepting a sardonic sergeant, this is the drama of officers of command. Brig. Gen. K. C. Dennis, commander of the Fifth Bombardment Division, is sending his division on three deadly missions beyond the range of fighter protection into Germany to destroy jet-plane production centers. The cost in lives is staggering. In Washington, staff officers are already uneasy about these losses. A visiting Congressman of considerable influence regards Dennis as a murderer. But Dennis knows that large losses on three missions will prevent the catastrophic losses that would be inevitable if the Germans were permitted to build jet planes at will. In the face of immediate human considerations he makes his decisions coldly, mathematically, aggressively.

Give Mr. Haines the privilege of a few heroics. For at the desk it took spiritual courage to send young men with physical courage into the deadly air over Germany. And the actors of "Command Decision" never make Mr. Haines' heroics false. As the commanding general, Paul Kelly is giving a superb performance—hard, rational, driving. Stephen Elliott is excellent in the part of an old buddy who shares the commander's convictions and implements them with his life.

• • •

As the commander's immediate superior, Jay Fassett is giving a capital performance of fussiness, guile and political timidity. There are conspicuously good performances by Lewis Martin as a forthright intelligence officer, Edward Binns as a competent executive officer, Paul McGrath as an ambitious air force brigadier and Paul Ford as an orotund Congressman. Most of the humor is relegated to the part of the cynical master sergeant, who regards the war strictly from the point of view of operations. James Whitmore is hilarious in this amusing part, playing the jokes close to the chest where they are funniest.

To give "Command Decision" workmanlike housing, Jo Mielziner has designed a utilitarian office room that suits the play perfectly. In fact, everyone has conspired with Mr. Haines to present Broadway with a knowing and decently-compassionate drama about one of the most inhuman operations human beings ever carried out. In addition to its impact in the theatre, "Command Decision" is an honest piece of work. Even Mr. Vishinsky would not confuse it with warmongering.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

OCTOBER 2, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

A New "Journey's End"

A WAR play of integrity and no little dramatic power has come to the Fulton. "Command Decision" considers the terrible responsibility of a heavy bombardment division commander, forced to shocking sacrifices of men and materiel in order to destroy the Nazi production of jet planes. William Wister Haines, who was in a position to know what he is writing about, has documented this his first play, with a wealth of incident. He has achieved an astringent and sometimes savagely comic mood on more than one occasion. Where he has failed is in letting the drama drag rather badly when it should have been held to a taut and compelling outline.

• • •

It is no fault of the production. Kermit Bloomgarden has assembled an almost perfect all-male cast for what is certain to be termed a 1947 "Journey's End." From Paul Kelly, in the embattled central role, to James Whitmore, as a sharp-tongued sergeant, the performances work wonders in sustaining the uneven pulse of "Command Decision." Jo Mielziner has designed a striking setting for the action and John O'Shaugnessy makes his directorial debut with remarkable authority. When episodes warrant it, they are given brilliant theatrical projection. It is only too bad that Haines, in dramatizing his novel, did not cut his work more ruthlessly.

• • •

It is not a pretty canvas he paints of military big wheels, short-sighted politicians, a confused war correspondent and men of good will dedicated to the horrible task of tactical warfare. To his great credit he has rarely let sentiment befuddle his plot, or venom distort it into a piece of special pleading. A particularly likable squadron leader goes down in flames over a murderous target. Brass and the supposed servants of the people take quite a lacing as a gallant general gets the heaveho as he is about to complete one of the most critical battles for air supremacy preceding D-Day. But it is the small touches of human drama which give "Command Decision" fitful illumination.

• • •

They should have been given more emphasis and pace in the general proceedings. Kelly is superb as the commander who succeeded a suicide and drives himself to the breaking point in sending bombers into the heart of Germany without fighter protection. He creates a brooding focal point for a script which is on the heavy side. Whitmore, armed with the work's most biting lines, delivers them triumphantly, whether he is settling a rape complaint, delivering whisky to V. I. P.s (very important persons), or making sarcastic cracks to those who harry his chief. Jay Fassett is good as the harassed superior of the division commander and Paul McGrath gives a good account of himself as the hero's unwilling successor. They have the misfortune of being entrusted with the more tedious passages of the offering. Stephen Elliott, Edward Binns, Arthur Franz, William Layton and many others give "Command Decision" an authentic ring. Haines, who served with the 8th Air Force in England, has written honestly, but none too ably.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 2, 1947

'Command Decision' Packs a Wallop

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Every Congressman, Senator and voter in America should be compelled to see "Command Decision," which Kermit Bloomgarden brought to the Fulton Theatre last evening. Then our country would never again be caught with its defenses down, we would never again be faced with the problem of too little too late.

"Command Decision" is based on William Wister Haines' best-seller of that title. Haines also made the dramatization, which packs a wallop like a bomb from a B-29. It is not only absorbing theatre, but a timely warning. Intelligent preparedness will save many lives.

Haines takes us to the office of Brigadier General K. C. Dennis at Headquarters of the 5th American Bombardment Division, Heavy, in England during the crucial stages of World War II. That courageous officer is trying to wipe out three German jet-plane factories.

Due to national complacency prior to the outbreak of the war, our air forces are inadequate to the global task placed upon them and it is the duty of conscientious commanders to use them to best advantage. Dennis is convinced he's right.

Not only does he have to send his fliers, some of them personal friends, to their deaths, but he also has to combat red-tape, legislative interference and attempts to disperse his limited resources to other objectives.

The factories are beyond range of fighter cover and his casualties are terrific. Questions are asked at home, and he can't answer them because of the secrecy necessary for success. Finally he is relieved of his command, but his replacement has the integrity to complete the job and face the consequences.

The gripping script is admirably performed by a large all-male cast under the capable direction of John O'Shaughnessy.

Paul Kelly is great as Dennis. He turns him inside out. He shows the heartbreak beneath the tough exterior, the valor and honesty of the man.

James Whitmore merits a citation for outstanding service as the loyal, shrewd, cynical sergeant who runs the general's office. This newcomer to the theatre is going places.

Lewis Martin also should be singled out for notably fine mining as a sincere and sound if not brilliant, intelligence officer.

"Command Decision" belongs on your see list.

"How I Wonder"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 1, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Brooding over the iniquities of life Donald Ogden Stewart, the Hollywood litterateur, has written an amiable but footless charade, "How I Wonder," which was put on at the Hudson last evening. Mr. Stewart is plagued by a good many current maladies—the third world war, the atom bomb, academic freedom, discrimination against Negroes and also the poor. To draw the attention of the public to these evils, and perhaps to purge his own mind, Mr. Stewart has invented a wondering professor of astronomy who battles with his mind on the one hand and a dream on the other, which takes up most of the evening.

No doubt Mr. Stewart is wholly sincere, as is Raymond Massey, who plays the vagrant professor with incomparable patience and kindness. For the possibility of a third war is something that makes men's hearts stand still the whole world over, and the mindless potentialities of the atom bomb have already destroyed the gaiety and the faith of men everywhere. These are things that cannot be lightly tossed aside as idle phantoms. All credit to Mr. Stewart for taking them seriously.

But "How I Wonder" is a parlor liberal's fantasy as though Mr. Stewart were just discovering the adult world. Seventeen years ago in "Rebound" he was brooding amiably about a world that was dissipated instead of depressed. "How I Wonder" may be the equal of "Rebound." But in the meantime life has moved on to some terrible experiences, and Mr. Stewart's vagrant fancies seem sophomoric by comparison. Possibly his astronomer's problem may be less profound than Mr. Stewart imagines. Possibly the whole thing comes down to the fact that the astronomer is married to a woman with no sense of humor. That can tangle a thinker's mind more than the atom bomb.

* * *

Taking Mr. Stewart at his word, Garson Kanin has directed an interesting performance in the midst of a beautiful, spacious rooftop setting by Donald Oenslager. It is always a pleasure to be a guest when Mr. Massey is acting, for he has a quiet, friendly style for the civilized parts, and he is at his best in "How I Wonder." As the astronomer's humorless wife, Carol Goodner is also giving a good performance. Among the other agreeable actors, wrestling with cosmology, are Byron McGrath, Bethel Leslie and John Marriott. The best part Mr. Stewart has written is for a character described as the astronomer's mind, and Everett Sloane, who plays it, has the rare privilege of moving his hands and feet and being alive. Mr. Sloane's impish clowning is superb entertainment.

'HOW I WONDER.'

Play by Donald Ogden Stewart; staged by Garson Kanin; setting and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Helene Pons; production executive George Greenberg; presented by Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin with Victor Samrock and William Fields at the Hudson Theater Tuesday evening, September 30, 1947. The cast:

Professor Lemuel Stevenson, Raymond Massey
Lem's Mind ..... Everett Sloane
Walter Smith ..... Henry Jones
Cliff Saunders ..... John Marriott
Margaret Stevenson ..... Carol Goodner
Christina Stevenson ..... Bethel Leslie
George Drummond ..... Byron McGrath
Dr. Hiller ..... John Sweet
Lisa ..... Meg Mundy
Henry Harkrider ..... Wyrley Birch

SYNOPSIS—Scene: The roof-top of the home of Professor Lemuel Stevenson. Act I. After dinner in early June of this year. Act II. The following evening. Act III. Later.

Some talented work has gone into the production of "How I Wonder." But Mr. Stewart is over his depth when he starts anatomizing the tortured skeleton of the world today. The fabulous Joe Cook was more his style, as the Stewart script for "Fine and Dandy" proved. When Joe spoke nonsense, he intended to.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 1, 1947

'How I Wonder' Is Radical Flop

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin, in association with Victor Samrock and William Fields, brought a booby-trap bore by Donald Ogden Stewart titled "How I Wonder" to the Hudson Theatre last evening.

It proved a relic of the 20's when it was fashionable in sophomoric circles to belabor the villainous industrials — you remember, the war-monger, craving conflict for filthy lucre. The same industrialist-war-monger who was to provide the weapons to beat Hitler, the money and machinery to rehabilitate Europe.

Stewart's hero is a famous astronomer threatened with psychiatric treatment by a college president and business men trustees because of radical social and political views.

Maybe the prexy had something after all, for Professor Samuel Stevenson was communing all evening with a pixie called "Mind" and Lisa, a weirdie attired in Annie Oakley costume, who could have been "Cosmic Conscience" or "Heavenly Heaves."

Stewart and Charlie McCarthy Stevenson really went after the bad old war-mongers in the second act. To these ears it sounded like a fifteen minute repeat of Commissar Vishinsky's juvenile jive of last week.

It would be superfluous to attempt to answer their sophistry after Daily Mirror colleague Walter Winchell's magnificent job of Sunday night over the ABC network. Were you listening, Commissar?

Among those wading through Stewart's cliches against America's development of atomic bombs and rockets for defense are Raymond Massey, Everett Sloane, Henry Jones, John Marriott, Carol Goodner, Bethel Leslie, Byron McGrath, John Sweet, Meg Mundy and Wyrley Birch.

Kanin directed.

The most enjoyable feature of the evening is a delightful rooftop set by Donald Oenslager, a charming place in which to live peacefully so long as America doesn't liquidate its industrialist war-mongers, atom bombs and rockets.

If it's a play about academic freedom you're seeking, just read or re-read Elliott Nugent and James Thurber's "The Male Animal". Their comedy is not another name for anesthetic.

The Sun

OCTOBER 1, 1947

Playwright Stewart's 'How I Wonder' Gives the Hudson a Dismal Premiere.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Donald Ogden Stewart, returning to the Broadway showshops after an absence of many seasons, has contributed some elusive and contemplative writing to a vexatious play called "How I Wonder," with which Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin begin a managerial partnership. The new piece was put on last night at the Hudson.

Playwright Stewart's principal character is Prof. Lem Stevenson, a truth-seeking astronomer greatly disturbed about the world in an atomic age. He is given to soliloquies and two imaginary characters are introduced to help him along. One of them is an agile fellow known as Lem's mind, forever popping out of the roof chimney or bounding out of the door. The other is a beautiful girl, who is Lem's inner self.

The device becomes pretty tiresome, because the mind and the inner self are around a great deal as the play goes its confusing way and Lem goes his. He loses the presidency of a university that is seeking his services because he tells off a trustee and it's only the discovery of a new star that saves his job as an astronomer. That security seems to make life clearer for Lem, but "How I Wonder" isn't saved so easily.

The waggish Donald Ogden Stewart, a humorist who has gone in, all of a sudden, for deep thinking and who is greatly concerned about a third world war, may have some solution for the ills of the world, but it isn't projected in his play at the Hudson. He writes some glib, flip, Barryesque dialogue, but he delivers no message and certainly no new vitality is brought to the theater by his play. I'm puzzled as to what such theater-wise people as Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin ever saw in it. Or can see now.

Raymond Massey, always an interesting and intelligent actor, gives a careful, thoughtful, unhurried performance as the scientist, a cynic and liberal, who wants a better deal for mankind. The genial Everett Sloane, playing Lem's mind, delivers the lines written in the playwright's more whimsical moments and he succeeds in being amusing until you become weary of the sight of him. Carol Goodner does what a good actress can with the negligible part of the professor's wife. Meg Mundy brings beauty and a lovely voice to the role of Lem's inner self, his better nature.

Byron McGrath contributes a straightforward performance as a sane, sound-thinking friend. Donald Oenslager gives the play a marvelous setting.

Donald Ogden Stewart's "How I Wonder" is an erratic and pretentious piece, and it reveals some high-powered talents providing a very dismal evening in the theater.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 1, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Astronomical Whimsy

DONALD OGDEN STEWART has brought more cosmic than comic consequence to his new comedy at the Hudson Theater. Under Garson Kanin's canny direction "How I Wonder" has a great deal of theatrical excitement. It is good to see a contemporary show calling a spade a spade on occasion, even in the elliptical idiom that has an inter-planetary glamour girl employing her wiles on a distinguished astronomer, or an alter ego of the professor heckling him with quotations from Kipling. All that is lacking in the latest fall offering is the dramatic substance which might have kept its curious conceits captivating.

The fact is that "How I Wonder" is as ridiculous as it is arresting. Stewart has become involved in something of an imbroglio about man's dignity, democracy, racial tolerance, the subconscious and mysticism. Even with the stalwart acting of Raymond Massey, as an embattled scientist, Everett Sloane, as his mind and conscience and Meg Mundy, in the part of a stellar oracle, the offering has more incidental eclat than over-all satisfaction. Donald Oenslager's roof-top setting frames the action in vivid panoply, but it demanded more tangible satire, or antic improvization than is to be found in the script.

• • •

The author and director have been chiefly concerned with a man of good will, who shrinks from the pattern of things to come. The good professor who keeps a centrifugal point to the exposition is recognizable and very worthy of stage celebration. At times he gives "How I Wonder" guts and irresistible comic inflections. Unfortunately the ply settles heavily for whimsy when it should have been simple and explicit. The fact that a minor theme introduces the plight of a Negro in modern society without in any way resolving the problem does not help matters a bit.

• • •

Massey is extraordinarily good as the scientist who listens to his mind and a mistress born of his prescience. He rarely looks like Massey, which is to say that he does a bang-up job of acting. Miss Mundy is excellent as the stray from inter-planetary space who tips off the fellow on the potential pandemonium of mankind and Carol Goodner, as his cautious wife, Everett Sloane, as his alter ego and Bethel Leslie as his nice daughter are altogether adequate to their assignments. "How I Wonder" has an electric theatrical quality but there has been a short-circuit along the line.

PM Exclusive

OCTOBER 2, 1947

Kronenberger

A Very Worthy Theme But a Wearisome Play

I fear that with the best of intentions Donald Ogden Stewart has turned out one of the flattest of plays. *How I Wonder* is concerned with some very vital issues of our time, but unfortunately lacks the slightest vitality of its own. It is one thing to write a play and quite another to write a play; and Mr. Stewart has almost ostentatiously seen to it that never the twain shall meet.

• • •

How I Wonder has to do with an astronomy professor who is confronted with the choices of conduct and lines of action that face almost all liberal intellectuals today. There is the matter of academic freedom; of academic advancement at the cost of intellectual honesty; of racial discrimination; and there is above all the business of the atom bomb, and of combatting an irresponsible movement toward war.

By way of Prof. Stevenson, Mr. Stewart gets his problems posed; in a sense he gets them aired; perhaps in his own mind he gets them answered. Certainly his hero does not fail him in the pinches; whatever the risks, the professor refuses to save his skin at the expense of his soul. But the feeling persists that despite its being enacted on a stage, none of this has really been dramatized; that it is all text and no texture. And the feeling persists that even if all this makes excellent sense, it makes tedious theater.

For the best that Mr. Stewart can do in the way of embroidering his tale is to make a threesome of Prof. Stevenson—introducing on the stage an imp who is the professor's Mind, and a floating female who is something like his Better Angel or his Innermost Desire. And theirs is the common fate of whimsy, however purposefully used: The lady is a crashing bore, and after a short time the imp seems like the exhibitionistic child of doting parents. Whatever else I complained of, I never expected to have to be cool toward Mr. Stewart's comedy, but in *How I Wonder* it's by no means up to snuff—or at any rate to Haddock. I guess you just can't depend on anybody any more.

• • •

Garson Kanin has probably directed these fleshless proceedings as well as he could; and Raymond Massey makes every effort to be human and natural as the professor. But he, Carol Goodner, Meg Mundy, Everett Sloane and others are rather like fish in a net. Donald Oenslager, being a freer agent, has turned out a very good set.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

OCTOBER 1, 1947

An Astronomer Faces The Atomic Age

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

There is so much that is true and eloquent about the spirit of Donald Ogden Stewart's "How I Wonder," which opened at the Hudson Theatre last night, that it seems almost ungenerous to say that its final effect is deeply dissatisfying. It is all the more distressing because such splendid theatrical talents have brought their best efforts to bear on it: Raymond Massey, Everett Sloane and a generally capable cast in acting, Donald Oenslager in scene designing, and, in particular, the enormously resourceful Garson Kanin in direction. The result demonstrates once more how far wrong the finest of intentions can go in the drama.

It is no tribute to the state of America or of the world to note that Mr. Stewart has written a timely contemporary play by treating of racial injustice, warmongering, the suppression of academic freedom, the perilous state of civil liberties, and the menacing potentialities of the atomic age. The author feels strongly and with honest liberal indignation about all of these matters, and it is certainly to his credit that he has not only done so, but that he has set down his impressions in a play that is essentially high-spirited, good-natured and brightly humorous.

Not Enough

The misfortune is that this is not enough. If "How I Wonder" gains from the earnestness of its purpose, the frequent eloquence of its writing, and the brightness of its comedy, it suffers even more from vagueness, long stretches of merely marking time, confusion of purpose, and failure to face the issues it brings up. It is a little difficult to see, for example, how its hero's triumph in astronomy, with all its ingenious symbolism about a self-destroyed planet in the far-off heavens, does anything more than bring about a strangely evasive happy ending.

Then, too, an unfortunately whimsical plan of story-telling gets in the way. Mr. Stewart presents a liberal professor of astronomy who wants to be honest and face the world as a courageous advocate of peace and freedom, but is gravely tempted to play politics and become the head of a university dominated by reactionary forces. To enable the hero to fight the battles of his conscience without recourse to soliloquies he has introduced two characters representing the professor's mind and, I suppose, his romantic dreams.

Three Talkers

The three of them engage in long chats, and I must say that although they were all good talkers, I grew tired of them. The mind, as impersonated by the invariably excellent Everett Sloane, was a whimsical and amusing fellow, though garrulous, and he became tiresome only on the seventh or eighth time he started to parody Kiplings "If." The girl member of the trio, however, who represented the hero's conscience or his romantic dreams or perhaps his temporary weariness of his wife, became such a bore that I hated to see her return to the stage, even though she was impersonated by the pictorial Meg Mundy.

Mr. Massey is excellent as the professor, making him idealistic without smugness and troubled without tendency to whine. It is a sturdy, humorous and impressive performance. The hero's wife and daughter are excellently played by Carol Goodner and the charming Bethel Leslie, while John Marriott is particularly good as a Negro the liberal professor almost lets down. But "How I Wonder" is not saved by all the talents that have been brought to it.

Journal and American

OCTOBER 1, 1947

A Puzzle-Pated Play On Lost Brotherhood

By ROBERT GARLAND

Mentioning no name, the Winter of Donald Ogden Stewart's sociologic discontent has seeped disastrously into "How I Wonder." And "How I Wonder" is (and I quote) the play (unquote) signed openly by Mr. Stewart and exposed last night at the Hudson Theatre by Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin in productional rahoots with Victor Samrock and William Fields.

It would seem that one of the minor tragedies following the falling of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was that its repercussions started Donald Ogden Stewart thinking. But, despite the promptings of that Winter of his sociologic discontent, neither wisely nor too well. As a professional funny-man, he's at his wits' end in the presence of non-laughing matters.

In "How I Wonder," Mr. Stewart's worried. He's obviously upset over the awfulness of our newborn atomic age. Aren't we all? But we don't sit down and write muddled "plays" about them, filling the already troubled air with woeful whimsicalities and prankish platitudes about planets, stars and the long-lost brotherhood of man.

* * *

Wonder

After everything has been said, after nothing has been done on 44th st., you wonder about "How I Wonder." What has this troubled funny-man in mind? What is he trying to say? What is he trying to do? What is his "play" trying so whimsically to start? What is his "play" trying so prankishly to end?

Surely Professor Lemuel Stevenson, arguing with himself on suburban roof-tops; followed from chaise-lounge to chimney-pot by Lem, his alter ego, and Lisa, his alter-lady friend; photographing stars that aren't there and receiving messages direct from God; talking double-talk to his wife, his daughter and his friends; boring himself, his alter-ego and his audience—

Surely this preposterous professor isn't supposed to represent the ideal American of tomorrow, the happy, inhabitant of a brand new world in which every prospect pleases and only the past is vile. Frankly, I was hoping all last evening that the wagon would back up and take the befuddled Lemuel Stevenson away. But no such happy ending came.

* * *

He Talks and Talks

As the star-gazer in college clothing, Raymond Massey is constantly on view. He talks to himself, his stars, his alter-ego and his alter-girl friend. Then, ever so infrequently, he snaps out of himself, and talks to his wife, Margaret; his daughter, Christina, his prexy, George Drummond, his servant, Cliff Saunders, and a mean old moneyman called Henry Harkrider.

Mr. Massey does everything in his power to make Professor Lemuel Stevenson sound sane and reasonable. But nothing other than the author's woeful whimsicality and prankish platitudes come out of his actorial endeavors. And, along with the playwriting Mr. Stewart, Raymond Massey's supporting players hinder rather than help him at the Hudson.

Donald Oenslager has constructed a high, wide and handsome setting for this low, narrow and puzzle-pated "play." And Garson Kanin, one of the quartet of producers, has directed it as if he believed it to be as low, narrow and puzzle-pated as I do ...How I wonder how "How I Wonder" ever got to Broadway. I'll wonder even more if it remains there!

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 1, 1947

In 'How I Wonder,' Mr. Stewart Almost Busts Himself Wondering

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Donald Ogden Stewart, author in the Twenties and Thirties of such fripperies as "Mr. and Mrs. Haddock Abroad," "Rebound" and "Fine and Dandy," has returned after many years of absence in a new incarnation, or guise. As closely as I can make out after examination of his play, "How I Wonder," I think he thinks he is now the Elbert Hubbard of the atomic age.

Mr. Stewart has recently been living on another planet, Hollywood. Out there people are very sensitive to any suggestion that they are mere commercial clucks, and on occasion one or another of them will bust loose with a work of art designed to persuade the rest of us that Hollywoodians Think—Think in capital letters, just the way Thomas J. Watson does.

Mr. Stewart's busting-loose occurred last evening at the Hudson Theatre in the presence of a startled, confused and well-clad audience. It was sponsored by two ordinarily sharp theatrical cookies, Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin, and Mr. Kanin directed the effort. It had, as its chief character, one of the easiest and ablest actors in current show business, Raymond Massey. It wasn't, on the whole, any good.

In "How I Wonder" Mr. Stewart warns us that if we let certain interests, represented in the play by a tycoon named Harkrider, horse us into another war it really is going to be the last war, because we all are going to fry in nuclear fission and our earth, set ablaze by atomic energy, will become just another star for some astronomer on another planet to photograph with his telescope.

The man he sets against Mr. Harkrider is Mr. Massey, playing a college astronomer named Stevenson. Mr. Massey spends his time on the roof of his house, thinking or dreaming. The rooftop, with the star-spangled sky above, has been artfully designed by Donald Oenslager. Its furnishings include lounge chairs, two chimneys, a water tower or cupola not unlike the house the witch baked out of children in "Hansel and Gretel" and a soap box. Not a really big soap box; just one about six inches high.

Mr. Massey's companions on this rooftop occasionally are his wife and daughter, but more often his mind, portrayed by Everett Sloane, and a dream woman from another planet, nicely posed and flatly acted by a photographer's model who says her name is Meg Mundy. When Mr. Massey gets to brooding about How He Wonders, Miss Mundy and Mr. Sloane come around and help him. But they never came down to my seat when I needed help.

Some Valid Theatre.

Massey, a college prof, has a chance to become president of another college controlled by Mr. Harkrider if he keeps his nose clean. But Mr. Massey worries about things and won't keep his mouth shut. He is even going down to a jail to help a Negro who is in there on a charge of stealing, when the only thing the fellow was doing was starting a union.

Some of Mr. Stewart's fancies are valid theatre, like the business of Mr. Massey arguing with his own reason, in the person of Mr. Sloane. Some of his whimseys are godawful and a far cry from the traveling Haddocks and their poisonous daughter. And his play, destined for posterity, has been graven on tablets of pure benzedrine.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 1, 1947

Star Gazer Ponders Atomic War

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"How I Wonder" recounts an unclear search by an unclear man for a way to prevent the earth's annihilation in another war.

This search is told in astronomical terms, as befits the self-analysis of a star gazer. Even his final highly moral if vague solution comes to him in the language of a satellite. This resolve is outlined for him by an Inner Light, who flings around Polish greetings. Not Russian, mind you, but Polish.

The Inner Light is named Lisa and wears a chamois jacket and a spotlight. His Mind quotes Kipling and nursery rhymes and plays baseball.

Revelation Embarrassing.

This revelation of the astronomer's intellect and inspiration is embarrassing and in this case unnecessary. Raymond Massey is quite capable of presenting a character of intelligence and humor under stress, without two other people rushing on the stage to explain what he is thinking.

The inverted dialogues, however, do not really justify the astronomer's coyly announcing that his night watchman was sent by God, or tritely asking whether anyone can ever go back.

Atom Burns Planet.

The astronomer here is a liberal and charitable man. He is trying to find a new planet, and he is risking his professional standing by voicing his antipathy to forces which believe another war is necessary. Moved to aid the unjustly jailed brother of his watchman, he finds that the brother has been a union organizer in a plant of an influential trustee of his college, one of the men who accepts the inevitability of a war.

His decision rests between risking his position and the security of his family, or fighting for what he knows is right.

His Mind and his Inner Light each win a victory without bringing him any lasting satisfaction. But his swing to the Light is the signal for the planet to appear, burned by an atomic war to a mere star.

His job is safe, his future assured. Instead of sniping at influential trustees, he will do some fighting on his own to prevent the Earth from repeating the performance of his planet.

What ought to be an inspirational evolution of a scholar into a man conscious of living responsibility, goes through some garbled contortions that make a listener hang on for dear life to keep up with what is going on. To say that this tripartite man is confused is a statement denying his mood's contagion.

Massey Is Sincere.

Just why the Inner Light speaks Polish is not made clear, unless it is to suggest that a Siberian salt mine is more like a Brotherhood-of-Man than an American jail.

Raymond Massey is sincere, warm and utterly natural as the astronomer, and manages to behave as if he rarely saw the on-stage prompters who beset him.

One suspects that Carol Goodner, by no means for the first time, may be too good an actress for her own good. She is so much a part of the play's fabric, so right, that it is very easy to assume she is simply being herself.

Everett Sloane is asked to behave like Alice's rabbit as the astronomer's Mind, and Meg Mundy is mystic and hollow cheeked as the Inner Light who shuttles from planet to planet. Bethel Leslie is solemnly appealing as the postwar bobby-sox daughter.

In the watchman's role John Marriott gives a quietly effective portrayal of resentful but dignified indignation.

Donald Oenslager gives the play a magnificent set with stunted suggestions of a roof's cupolas and an endlessly vast startlit sky. It would be an exquisite setting for a Tudor ballet about an astronomer and his conscience called "What on Earth?"

"The Heiress"

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

'The Heiress' a Carefully Staged Costume Drama for Wendy Hiller

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In passing through his native America on the way to London Henry James wrote, in 1881, a novel titled "Washington Square." Out of this book Ruth and Augustus Goetz have made a play and this play, "The Heiress," was carefully and affectionately presented last evening at the Biltmore Theatre. It has all the charm and some of the discomforts of a horsehair sofa.

I would say that "The Heiress" is for a curio collector like me. If you are willing to give it the time, which is considerable, and to fall in with its quaint qualities, you will be pleasantly rewarded. There is an interesting performance by an interesting actress, Wendy Hiller, and there is some admirable staging by that Madman Munts of the footlights, Jed Harris. Mr. Harris is one of the few people who really are stage-struck, and when he goes to work on a production he puts his autograph all over it. I happen to think that this autograph is a hallmark of stagecraft.

True to the Period.

I fear, though, that "The Heiress" is mostly for audiences which will come with a predisposition for liking it. It is talky and its big scenes, like Miss Hiller falling in love in the first act and renouncing it in the last, are rather old hat. But they are honest; they are in the spirit of the period and they are very nicely played.

Last evening in its various episodes "The Heiress" reminded me of "Angel Street," of "Rebecca," of "The Old Maid" and of a fine but unsuccessful movie Orson Welles made out of Booth Tarkington's "The Magnificent Ambersons."

A Well Cast Play.

It is about a girl who has $10,000 a year in her own right and $20,000 more coming when her father, a fashionable Washington Square doctor, kicks off—big money for the 1880's and not so bad now. Her father is like Mr. Manningham, of "Angel Street"—a precise and sinister fellow played precisely and nastily by Basil Rathbone. A charming ne'er-do-well woos and wins the girl and jilts her. She, a shy and love-hungry creature, has the final triumph. In her turn she renounces her lover, for she finally has learned how to be as precise and sinister as her father was.

Raymond Sovey's setting of a spacious Washington Square house is delightful. Patricia Collinge gives one of her wispy performances as an aunt of the girl, and Peter Cookson has charm as the fortune-hunting young man. "The Heiress" is a period piece, affectionately written and intelligently directed.

'THE HEIRESS.'

Play by Ruth and Augustus Goetz; suggested by Henry James's novel "Washington Square"; staged by Jed Harris; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by Fred F. Finklehoffe at the Biltmore Theater Monday evening, September 29, 1947. The cast:

Maria	Fiona O'Shiel
Dr. Austin Sloper	Basil Rathbone
Lavinia Penniman	Patricia Collinge
Catherine Sloper	Wendy Hiller
Elizabeth Almond	Katharine Rant
Arthur Townsend	Craig Kelly
Marian Almond	Augusta Roeland
Morris Townsend	Peter Cookson
Mrs. Montgomery	Betty Linley

SYNOPSIS: Time—About 1850. Place—The front parlor of Dr. Sloper's home in Washington Square, New York. Act I, scene 1—An October evening. Scene 2—Two weeks late. Scene 3—The following day. Act II, scene 1—Six months later. Scene 2—Two hours later. Scene 3—Three days later. Scene 4—A summer evening, two years later.

"The Heiress"—*continued*

Herald Tribune (New York)

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Old Lace, but Tattered

THE story-telling talent of Henry James flickers feebly in "The Heiress." The Ruth and Augustus Goetz adaptation of his novel, "Washington Square," talks itself to a standstill at the Biltmore Theater. Despite the all-out efforts of such artificers as Wendy Hiller, Patricia Collinge and Basil Rathbone, and the stately staging of Jed Harris, it is a soporific show. There are moments when a doomed romance between the rich daughter of a doctor and what used to be known in the play's period of 1850 as a fortune-hunter, has poignant and arresting stage statement. After seven extended scenes in which the principals discuss the situation, it is as limp as a rag doll.

* * *

There is authority along with the boredom in this period reconstruction of manners, conventions and emotional frustration a hundred years ago. Occasionally, the authors have pitched their lines to a ringing key of bittersweet tragedy. When they have done so, the players have realized all the overtones of color and excitement which are so niggardly offered in the script. The climax to the first act, which finds the heiress jilted because her suitor thinks that she will be cut off from a $20,000 income, is admirably and ruefully echoed in the climax, when she gives the gentleman the gate. These snatches of telling make-believe scarcely suffice to make "The Heiress" a satisfying entertainment.

* * *

Harris must have been genuinely bewitched by the script. Although he is one of the shrewdest showmen in the theater, he has directed this Fred F. Finklehoffe production as though it were a Chekov masterpiece. From the standpoint of the spectator, it was a very bad idea. The best that has been contrived in the way of staging is having several of the principals turn their backs on the audience, or introducing some offstage noises designating the passing of hansom cabs and carriages on the square. For most of the time "The Heiress" settles for stilted chit-chat between the lady of the title, her properly sceptical father, a shiftless Lochinvar and a fatuous aunt.

* * *

Wendy Hiller, who may be seen to better advantage in the current British film, "I Know Where I'm Going," struggles with a tough role and an English accent in the chief part. She achieves interludes of old lace sentiment, but she is generally reduced to windy talking and tatting. Miss Collinge is splendid as the aunt who wishes an ungainly girl to get her share of happiness, even with a rogue.

Peter Cookson plays the calculating suitor in a strictly conventional manner and Rathbone waggles a beard with a minimum of conviction as papa. "The Heiress" deals with a delicate and perhaps consequential dramatic theme. It labors it right up to point of ennui.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

The Season's First Hit Finally Arrives

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

There can be no doubt that when the eminent Jed Harris is in proper form his touch is one of the exciting things of the American theatre. He hasn't been doing much about putting us in his debt in recent seasons, but it is pleasant to report that he is right back on top today. His direction of "The Heiress," which opened at the Biltmore Theatre last night, is so sure and skillful, so filled with the proper style and the knowing appreciation of dramatic values that a bitter, steadily interesting but not especially distinguished drama becomes what I think I am safe in calling the first hit of the season.

Next to Mr. Harris' shrewd production, the most valuable contribution to the success of "The Heiress" is the brilliant playing of Wendy Hiller, the oncoming English actress, in the title role. As a plain, shy girl, longing for love and made hard and bitter by the cruelty of a fortune-hunting suitor and a father who hated her, she manages a difficult part without sentimentality or any of the other conventions of such a characterization, and makes it honestly moving and completely real. It is a stunning portrayal that sets a high mark for the actresses of the season to shoot at.

The Play

The play, which Ruth and Augutus Goetz have based on Henry James' novel, "Washington Square," is somewhat less striking than the direction of Mr. Harris and the playing of Miss Hiller make it frequently seem, but it is a sound and effective drama, with intelligence and an honest core of bitterness to it. Its writing may not always be as distinctive or as sardonic as it might be, but it is never maudlin and is sometimes almost painfully moving.

The background is New York in the 1850s, and the opportunities for period atmosphere are happily taken advantage of with taste and without extravagance. Raymond Sovey's setting of a wealthy doctor's residence in Washington Square and Mary Percy Schenck's costumes are handsome and colorful, and they add greatly to the general effectiveness of the production.

A Fine Cast

Miss Hiller's portrayal is the notable acting achievement of "The Heiress," but all the players have been wisely cast and are in excellent form. Patricia Collinge, who seems to be of help to every play in which she appears, is at her best as a foolish, well-meaning aunt, while Peter Cookson's fortune hunter succeeds in suggesting perfectly the superficial charm and innate selfishness of the man. Basil Rathbone, although perhaps slightly too mannered for comfort, is effective as the cold, embittered father, and the minor parts, particularly Betty Linley's brief role as the fortune hunter's harassed aunt, are perfectly managed.

Although its emotional qualities give the new play a strong audience appeal, the inner bitterness and ironical scorn of any romantic satisfaction, as well as the general excellence, of "The Heiress" make it considerably more than a period dramatic valentine. It is a good and forthright play, given theatrical distinction by exceptional acting and direction. The drama season, it is now possible to report, has finally got started.

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

'The Heiress' a Taut, Bitter Play, Expertly Staged and Played at Biltmore.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The play called "The Heiress," in a previous incarnation, failed quickly in a bleak tryout. Now, rewritten and recast and restaged, it is given a second chance and it is something to cheer about. The hand of a fine director was in evidence last night at the Biltmore.

"The Heiress," written by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, and suggested by Henry James's novel, "Washington Square," is a taut and bitter play that holds you every instant. Jed Harris has recaptured all the magic of his "Green Bay Tree" days in his job of direction, and the players that he and Fred F. Finklehoffe have assembled in 47th street come through brilliantly.

In seven scenes and two acts the authors present the story of a shy, unloved and pathetically awkward girl, daughter of a wealthy surgeon, who is deserted on the night of her planned elopement after she has told her suitor that she will be disinherited by her tyrannical father.

The father dies. Two years pass. The suave, handsome, fortune-seeking young man returns. He is penitent, eager, importunate. There are again excited plans for an immediate marriage, but now Catherine Sloper is hard, bitter, disillusioned. When the crunch of the carriage wheels are heard outside the stately mansion her decision has been made. It is now her turn to do the jilting.

There is a performance of great sensitivity from Wendy Hiller as the unalluring girl who is told by her own father of her plainness and that she is sought only because of her money. Basil Rathbone gives us his best playing in some years as the almost demoniacal Dr. Sloper, resentful of his daughter and still tormented by the memory of his wife, who died in childbirth.

Patricia Collinge, an actress of enormous skill—and she has been demonstrating it ever since "Everywoman" and "The Show Shop," done in her tender years—is superb as the doctor's sister, in favor of Catherine getting her man at any cost. Peter Cookson is entirely right as the sleek, spoiled, fortune-hunting young man. And there are good performances from Betty Linley, Fiona O'Shiel and Augusta Roeland. Raymond Sovey's setting, the front parlor of the Sloper home in Washington Square, 1850, is perfect.

Here the season is only a few days old and there's already proof that good stage direction, Jed Harris's kind of direction, is not dead. The old master has regained his form. And he has made "The Heiress" something worth seeing.

Daily Mirror

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

B'way Has New Hit In 'Heiress'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

At long last Broadway has a thrilling new hit. It's "The Heiress" at the Biltmore Theatre. Fred Finklehoffe produced and Jed Harris directed. Wendy Hiller and Basil Rathbone are the stars.

"The Heiress" was dramatized by Ruth and Augustus Goetz from the Henry James tome, "Washington Square." It had a tryout under the Jamesian title last season and was closed by the then producer, Oscar Serlin, because of casting difficulties.

"The Heiress" is a bitter, relentless, absorbing character study of a shy young girl driven to cruelty and self-assurance by a stern, superior father and a glib, fortune-hunting fiance.

The father, an eminent physician, is disappointed in the daughter because her mother had been a woman of charm and poise. The death of the mother at the birth of the daughter was further cause for strained relations between them.

Then along came a handsome young waster to propose to the girl. He wanted her beautiful house in Washington Square and the $30,000 a year which were to be hers some day. And $30,000 was a lot of money back about 1850. The shrewd father, recognizing the suitor for a bad lot, threatened to disinherit the daughter, causing the suitor to run out on her.

Two years later the deserter came back to New York to find the girl in possession of house and fortune, her father having died meanwhile. This results in one of the most gripping scenes you are likely to see in a theatre this season. We are not going to tell you what happened. We do not want to lessen the suspense for those of you who are going to see it. And many of you are.

Though Serlin had trouble in assembling the proper cast for the piece, Finklehoffe has not. Miss Hiller, who has been making films in England since she last appeared here in "Love on the Dole," and Rathbone are magnificent as daughter and father.

Peter Cookson, about whom we have penned flattering notices in other plays, is adequate as the suitor in his one. His is a good, but not brilliant performance, overshadowed by the superlative miming of Miss Hiller and Rathbone.

Patricia Collinge makes the most of the opportunities provided by her part and director Harris. And there are helpful contributions by Fiona O'Shiel, Augusta Roeland, Katharine Raht.

It is good to have a distinguished play on Broadway again. It is good to enjoy a play that does not insult the intelligence with pap and tinsel. It is good to listen to meaningful dialogue and study character conceived by a master craftsman.

Finklehoffe, Harris and associates have lent stature to the new season. We salute them gratefully.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

'The Heiress' a Bitter Play of Frustrated Love

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The pivotal figure of "The Heiress" is a girl who frequently had her day during war. Graceless, shy and plain, she might have been a Wac or Wave, and away from competition on an island or a desert become the flamingly popular heroine of many men.

In 1850 Catherine Sloper finds her brief moment and her dry destiny through the attentions of a transparent fortune hunter.

She has grown abject with uneasiness through her father's ceaseless comparison of her to the gay mother who died at her birth. Her only faint pride is in stewarding his house and making samplers.

Prey to Worthless Suitor.

She is an easy prey for the handsome and worthless Morris, whom the doctor, her father, sees through and opposes as only interested in the money she has and the added fortune he will leave her. Catherine clings to the flattery she insists is love, and with his back against the wall, the doctor finally tells her how lacking in enchantment she really is.

Feeling he has always despised her, she ingenuously loses her lover by throwing her whole trust in him. She can only become cold, bitter and gratuitously cruel.

The play maintains an aura of human rot about it that derives from the Henry James novel which was its genesis. This decadence never comes to the surface, but lurks behind what is said and done.

Suggestion of Emotion.

What is apparent is more often the civilized suggestion of emotion, with rare moments of spontaneous honesty. In this sense the quality of a novel hangs over the play. One feels that what Catherine thinks as she stares alone and silently across Washington Square in the dead of night, is more real than what she does in the drawing room.

The undefiled progress of this single situation brings a craving for more actual insight. The characters are tantalizing with an unattainable familiarity. As with acquaintances, one accepts what they do without always knowing why they do it.

If the subtle tone of the play spreads thin, it is perhaps because it is so difficult to feel real sympathy for any of the characters. Even Catherine, whose wish to be loved might be so touching, is obtuse and knows it. A much more generous and understanding father would have been hard put to it to make her happy. With the doctor it is simply a choice of unhappinesses for her.

Fine Performance.

Wendy Hiller is fine as the inauspicious Catherine. She makes the girl's taut nervousness a delicately projected quality, and one feels that the fullest blown passion of her life was felt when she had to doubt her lover.

Her final development is a willful defense against a life that never really gave her a beggar's chance.

Basil Rathbone is subtly moving as the doctor. He develops the character in gentle and convincing terms.

This father is withdrawn and impersonal, covering his impatience with his daughter by edgy politeness. The actor suggests that the decision he must make about his daughter is one he has foretold in imagination for years.

Romantic Widow.

Patricia Collinge brings fluttery warmth to the play as an incurably romantic widow. To a character used largely for constructive purposes of the play, she adds a light of her own.

Peter Cookson has a handsome suggestion of opportunism in everything the suitor says, and Betty Linley handles most satisfyingly her one scene as his sister.

Jed Harris' direction invests the play with the rare realization of a sustained attitude.

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

With the assistance of Wendy Hiller and Basil Rathbone, a bit of Henry James came into the theatre last evening. Using "Washington Square" as their source-book, Ruth and Augustus Goetz call their drama "The Heiress," which is now on the stage of the Biltmore. Set in New York of a century ago, it is the tale of a dull and modest young lady who gives her heart to an idle fortune-seeker. Her father despises her for her stupidity. Her suitor jilts her when he discovers that the fortune would be less than he anticipated. In the end she has the revenge of refusing him when he comes again. But the revenge is tiny compensation for the desolation of an old maid's life.

• • •

As things have been going on Broadway recently, "The Heiress" is a refreshing excursion into intelligence and good taste. But the fact is that the authors have had a good deal of difficulty in making a play out of undramatic material. For "Washington Square" is a story of intangibles, told with an ironic reticence that scrupulously avoids big scenes. By calling their play "The Heiress," the authors indicate that they are not attempting a literal transcription of the Henry James novel. But neither have they succeeded in writing an independent work of art. For "The Heiress" begins to lose its mastery of the theme at the end of the first act when it puts the father, suitor and daughter in a gaudy scene; and it has nothing much more than well-bred flourishes of theatre to strew through the second act. It is difficult to make a stupid woman the heroine of an interesting drama. Probably that is the basic infirmity of this elusive play.

Nor has Miss Hiller succeeded in the task that has defeated the authors. She is an admirable actress, highly esteemed in America as well as England, and well-remembered for her acting in "Love on the Dole" and "Pygmalion." But in an effort to contribute some dramatic contrast to the plain part of Catherine Sloper, she has made her a rather painfully abnormal person in the early half of the drama, and her composure toward the end of it is not exhilarating. Nothing Miss Hiller has been able to do alters a general impression that poor Catherine is better off inside the discreet, impeccable pages of Henry James.

• • •

As Dr. Sloper, Catherine's keenly-inhuman parent, Mr. Rathbone has one of his most actable parts. He plays it perfectly with irony and arrogance. Patricia Collinge is playing Lavinia Penniman with the intolerable romanticism of a silly character, which is precisely what the part requires. As the fickle suitor, Peter Cookson is giving an attractive performance of a part that sought to be a trifle more sinister and cunning. Something should be said in praise of Betty Linley's acting of a genteel widow who behaves with pride in a scene that is stacked against her.

To house this fable of manners and a mercenary, Raymond Sovey has designed an imposing drawing-room, attractively furnished. But the nature of the materials in the Henry James novel has sorely tried the resourcefulness of Jed Harris, as the director, and of the authors as well. The heroine cannot be acted; she can only be acted against. The story cannot be dramatized.

PM

OCTOBER 1, 1947

Kronenberger

No Longer a Work of Art, But an Interesting Drama

There aren't a great many perfect novels in English, but Henry James' *Washington Square* must very nearly be one of them. Cool, dry, a little Jane Austenish, it tells one of those small vivid stories that hover somewhere between the merely touching and the almost terrible; and tells it with the distinction, the avoidance of the lurid, the horror of exclamation points, that it asks for. I don't suppose it has ever been very popular, or ever will be; there will always be something grander or flashier, more noteworthy or more newsworthy, to seduce the run of readers. But the connoisseur prizes it.

• • •

Yet, for all that it rather languishes on the bookshelf, I can understand very well the temptation to dramatize it. Not, God knows, because it is particularly dramatic. It isn't; one might almost say, it shouldn't be. Rather because the situation in it is so compact, and the working out so sharp and unwasteful; and no doubt too, because the New York of a century ago seems always an alluring subject for the stage. In any case, there is where Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have put it, under the title of *The Heiress*; and not by any means in vain. Measured against the work of art it derives from, it is faulty and undistinguished. Considered simply as a theater piece, it is rather faulty, too. There are times when Mr. and Mrs. Goetz seem bent on misunderstanding what Henry James was trying to do, and when any admirer of the novel must be offended and even outraged. All the same, I was always interested by what went on, and even at moments impressed.

• • •

The heiress of the play, Catherine Sloper, is an awkward, negative, plain-looking girl who falls passionately in love with an attractive fortune hunter named Morris Townsend. A silly aunt tries to further the match; but Catherine's cold, sardonic father, who resents her because her beautiful mother died in giving her birth, and who despises her because she has none of her mother's charm, violently opposes it. It is enough for him to have read Townsend's mind; he is quite unconcerned about Catherine's heart. Realizing that she will be disinherited, Townsend at the last moment jilts her. Later, after her father is dead, Townsend renews his addresses, and Catherine, now grown into a hard, bitter old maid, pretends to succumb that she may be revenged by at the last minute jilting him.

• • •

Preserving the main lines of James' novel, Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have caught some of the poignancy in Catherine's story, and rather improved on the pitilessness of its working out. *The Heiress* remains a more "honest" play than commonly comes to Broadway, and on the whole a more interesting and intelligent one. Such praise is decidedly relative, but is praise for all that. Nevertheless, the change in media has led to a considerable difference in merit.

In *Washington Square*, James never raises his voice; yet we see Catherine, as it were, closed in upon from three sides (the aunt has much less importance in the play); we see Catherine's life shattered by three worldlings. She is too small and passive a figure for tragedy; but not for pity, not for irony. The tone of the book, again, is too well-bred for castigating a whole milieu, but never ceases to comment on it. But the play cannot risk being so soft-spoken; it must raise its voice; and when it does, it seems to come from an alien throat. The Goetzes have Catherine melodramatically jilted at midnight: James does not. The Goetzes have Catherine melodramatically jilt Townsend in turn: James does not. And in both cases the Goetzes strike a very discordant note. It's not that James was incapable of such melodrama, but that Catherine was. The harsh, revengeful woman at the end of *The Heiress* may be rather effective in her fashion, but she is no longer Catherine. The authors knew they could not soften the story for the stage; they saw that a happy ending would be absurd. So they apparently decided that the next best thing was to harden it, not realizing that an acrid ending would be excessive.

• • •

Jed Harris has brought a good deal of his drive and mettle to staging the play, so that despite a good deal of talk it holds up quite well as theater. Wendy Hiller's Catherine seems to me an extension of the Goetzes' Catherine: striking but not very soundly conceived. Miss Hiller is too animal-like at times, and at the end too grand. As the father and the fortune hunter, Basil Rathbone and Peter Cookson are both very good. Patricia Collinge plays the silly aunt for what the part permits, but it has been shorn of dimension. Raymond Sovey's period set is correct and handsome.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal and American

SEPTEMBER 30, 1947

Flawless Cast Offers Superb Period Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

Casting off a protracted spell of plain and fancy fumbling, the New York Theatrical Season of 1947-1948 got into its hoped-for stride last evening at the Biltmore. There, in the presence of a stylish congregation, Fred Finklehoffe brought the Ruth and Augustus Goetz dramatization of the Henry James "Washington Square" to Broadway.

Now known as "The Heiress"—why not "The Heiress of Washington Square"?—it's a period piece of quality and drive.

With Basil Rathbone and Wendy Hiller starred, with Patricia Collinge featured, with Peter Cookson on his way to featuredom, Henry James' bitter study of inheritance and frustration maintains magnitude and merit.

"The Heiress" has benefited by revamping since, last season and up New England way, it was tested and found wanting by Oscar Serlin. This time, with Jed Harris' direction, a practically flawless cast projects the piece with typical Victorian intensity. It emerges as good sound theatre, through and through...

Henry James, himself—that pre-Freudian!—would, I'm sure, give it his blessing.

Fine Flavor Retained

In an authentic 1850 setting designed by Raymond *Sovey*—programs refer to him as "Covey"—and in authentic 1850 costumes designed by Mary Schenck, the fine sardonic flavor of the original novel becomes alive and three dimensional. Mr. and Mrs. Goetz, the dramatists, have made this third dimension possible.

You meet Catherine Sloper and her father early in their play's unfolding. And, with a bow to Morris Townsend and his fortune-hunter's wooing, it's Catherine Sloper and her father with whom "The Heiress" forthrightly deals. Theirs is the tragic comedy Henry James had in mind when "Washington Square" was written.

Theirs is the tragic comedy dominating the novel-into-play which, to each intent and purpose, opened the new season at the Biltmore. Nevertheless, Lavinia Penniman, Mrs. Montgomery and, as has been hinted, Morris Townsend remain in the picture, surrounding and motivating the father-against-daughter feud...

And, as on-stage tables turn, the daughter-against-father feud and the Catherine-against-Morris climax.

Miss Hiller Superb

Wendy Hiller, "round-acting" in America for the first time since her memorable appearance as Sally Hardcastle in "Love on the Dole"—at the Shubert Theatre in February, 1936—is superb as the Catherine Sloper of Henry James' tragic comedy. In person Miss Hiller has been away too long.

Basil Rathbone is high, hard and handsome as the embittered Dr. Sloper. High, hard and handsome is what he's asked to be. Patricia Collinge is right as Lavinia Penniman. And, were I the producing Mr. Finklehoffe, I'd co-feature Peter Cookson along with Miss Collinge in honor of his unpretty portrait of a cad with charm.

As much as I admire "The Heiress" at the Biltmore, as much as I intend to keep on admiring it, I realize that, on stage or off, Henry James' "Washington Square" isn't for everybody. But it's most certainly for me, just as it was for last night's first audience, which rewarded it by encore after encore, with other appreciative sounds thrown in...

The miracle is that, after almost three-quarters of a century, Henry James should reach Broadway. Or Broadway reach Henry James!

"Our Lan'"

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

'Our Lan'' Is an Eloquent, Ungainly Drama, and a Disappointment at Royale.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Our Lan'," which caused something of a stir when done last season in Grand Street, was moved uptown Saturday evening, being presented at the Royale, and I found it keenly disappointing. It is a drama written out of deep feeling and it has moments of power and beauty, but it is also a spasmodic and episodic play and fails to sustain the mood that is frequently created.

Here is Theodore Ward's folk tale of a band of liberated slaves who settle on an island off the coast of Georgia and lay claim to it as their own land, given them by Gen. Sherman. Later, with the close of the Civil War, the Southern planters come to reclaim the land, accompanied, ironically enough, by a platoon of Union soldiers.

The Negroes, inspired by their courageous leader, Joshua, offer resistance, but they soon realize that their cause is doomed. Joshua, however, refuses to leave. With his Delphine at his side, and singing haunting spirituals, he awaits destruction from a Union Army cannon, to be fired from a scow with the setting of the sun.

There is eloquence in numerous scenes of "Our Lan'," excitement in the stage groupings, and poignance in the plight of the Negroes being routed from their land by the very men who freed them, but Theodore Ward's drama, in an uptown showcase, remains a fitful play. It runs down steadily in its second half and it is never strengthened by a sub-plot that has to do with the seduction of the handsome Delphine by the rascally son of a wealthy mulatto.

The tall, gaunt, deep-voiced William Veasey dominates the drama. He plays the leader of the freedmen as a man of pride and dignity and his Joshua is a convincing figure, even when the play lets him down. Muriel Smith is excellent as the weak Delphine, who submits to Ollie Webster during a thunderstorm. She sings beautifully. Gene O'Donnell brings a great deal of force to the role of a fair-minded Union captain, assigned to the unpleasant task of driving the Negroes from their island. Julie Haydon has a scanty role, that of a school teacher, and Frank Tweddell appears as a relentless planter.

Eddie Dowling has achieved some fine ensemble effects in his staging and Ralph Alswang's settings and lighting seem appropriate, but "Our Lan'," as revealed at the Royale, is not an impressive drama. Theodore Ward has written with warmth and vehemence, but he has not built his play into one of sustained force. And he frequently sidetracks his main story to give his attention to his secondary plot, which is of no value at all.

"Our Lan'" is eloquent but ungainly.

'OUR LAN'.'

Play by Theodore Ward; staged by Eddie Dowling; settings and lighting by Ralph Alswang; associate director Edward R. Mitchell; choral arrangements and direction by Joshua Lee; presented by Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer at the Royale Theater Saturday evening, September 27, 1947. The cast:

Edgar Price	Irving Barnes
Dale Pettier	Herman Phillips
Emanuel Price	Louis Peterson
Patsy Ross	Theresa Merritte
Joe Ross	Augustus Smith Sr.
Charlie Batlow	Emory Richardson
Ellen	Valerie Black
James	Harold Conklin
Daddy Sykes	Service Bell
Roxanna	Margo Washington
Delphine	Muriel Smith
Beulah	Dolores Woodward
Ruth	Martha Evans
Martha	Paula Oliver
Alice	Mary Lucille McBride
Fred Douglas	Augustus Smith Jr.
Tom Taggart	Jay Brooks
Minnie	Blanche Christopher
Sarah	Estelle Rolle Evans
Joshua Tate	William Veasey
Georgana	Virginia Chapman
Josia	Edith Atuka Reid
Ollie Webster	Richard Angarola
Lem	Chauncey Reynolds
Chester	Edmund Cambridge
Hank Saunders	Charles Lilienthal
Capt. Bryant	Jack Becker
Libeth Arbarchasi	Julie Haydon
Oliver Webster	James Harwood
Yank Sergeant	Stuart Hoover
Capt. Stewart	Gene O'Donnell
John Burkhardt	Frank Tweddell
Cotton broker	Graham Velsey
First rebel soldier	Nathan Adler
Second rebel soldier	Michael Higgins

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A cave on a road to Savannah, evening, January, 1865. Scene 2. The forge on an island off the coast of Georgia an afternoon two days later. Scene 3. The island three months later. Scene 4. April 14, 1865. Scene 5. That evening. Act II. Scene 1. The island a week later. Scene 2. Six weeks later. Scene 3. Several months later. Scene 4. A week later. Scene 5. The following afternoon.

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

'Our Lan'' Brought Uptown to the Royale, Presents Scenes of Heart-Breaking Emotion

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By coming uptown from Grand Street, where it was originally produced last April, Theodore Ward's "Our Lan'" has acquired theatrical dimensions and lost simplicity. On the large stage of the Royale, where it was acted Saturday evening, the theatrical weakness of the script assumes an importance it did not have in the tiny downtown playhouse last spring.

What remains are several scenes of heart-breaking emotional force in the lives of Negroes who settled on an island near Georgia during the Civil War. Many of the finest scenes are between William Veasey and Muriel Smith, who are actors of remarkable magnetism. Mr. Veasey, better known as a singer, is a tall, gaunt man with a deep voice. Although he is technically awkward as an actor and has a spasmodic delivery, he radiates a kind of towering strength and sincerity suiting the part of Joshua, a native field hand with the stature of a prophet.

* * *

Miss Smith is also a singer, best known for her Carmen Jones four years ago. As an actress she is altogether admirable, with lightness of touch in playing a scene and personal sweetness and pride of character. She is acting the rueful part of a slave housemaid who loves Joshua. The brief scenes between Mr. Veasey and Miss Smith are very beautiful indeed, for, despite their different qualities as performers, they have a direct way of getting to the heart of human emotion and a great gift for expressing it in terms of the theatre. Broadway should place a high value on the translucent glimpses of character and life they have torn open in this play.

Mr. Ward, author of "Our Lan,'" is telling the story of some footloose Negroes who, acting on the authority of General Sherman, settle on an island owned by an emigré Southern planter and raised a crop. To them the Civil War is one of almost incredible liberation. But in the final scenes of disillusionment they learn that they are exchanging one form of serfdom for another, and that as a result of politics in Washington, the Yankee Army is unable to fulfill General Sherman's audacious promises. Let us take comfort from remembering that even the Civil War ended badly.

As story-teller, Mr. Ward has a knack of selecting simple moments that are fervently revealing—sometimes noble, sometimes pathetic, always honest and warm-hearted. But he does not get far beneath the surface of his narrative in terms of poetry or drama. And being an unresourceful stage writer, he leans too heavily on the prop of spirituals, which have become a cliché in the theatre when they are offered as a substitute for thought or craftsmanship.

* * *

Mr. Dowling's direction is somewhat too professional for this artless story, which has now lost some of the spontaneity and intimacy it had downtown. At the opening performance it was also difficult to hear what the actors were saying; they were speaking too rapidly for so large a theatre. Once, in a scene vital to the rest of the story, an over-enthusiastic wind-machine that must have come out of an old melodrama, muffled the performance and destroyed the line of the drama. In that whirring hurricane scene Mr. Dowling does not take time to tell Mr. Ward's story.

The long cast includes Julie Haydon as a teacher from the North, Valerie Black, Frank Tweddell, Gene O'Donnell and several other good actors. In designing the wide though unlovely setting Ralph Alswang has lost the sunny hospitality of the downtown set. "Our Lan'" had more personality in Edward Mitchell's original setting that could be lived in. Without improving on its Grand Street forebear, the Broadway production has yielded up some of the winning, native quality "Our Lan'" originally had.

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

'Our Lan'' No Thriller, but Brings A Needed Dignity to the Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Something approaching the quality necessary for a real theatrical season is to be found in Theodore Ward's drama about a group of Negroes just after the Civil War, "Our Lan'," which had its uptown premiere Saturday evening at the Royale Theatre.

I did not find "Our Lan'" any too stirring as a play, nor was I unaware of some raggedness, some obviousness in the writing. But Mr. Ward's sincerity, his integrity (a lack of cheapness) and the manner in which his work has been staged and is played, make it worth the trouble to bring "Our Lan'" up from the Henry Street Settlement to the larger audience of Broadway.

A new playwright with obviously high regard for his calling has been given encouragement—the encouragement of a bang-up job of staging and the backing of the Theatre Guild's subscription list. This is the kind of thing the living stage should do, instead of horsing around with movie angles and quick-money trash.

Stunning Production.

I believe that "Our Lan'" is for a limited audience—the audience which is willing to give a little, instead of just sitting and taking. Among the rewards for this audience are a stunning production, visually, and several interesting performances—the best being by Muriel Smith, our old enchantress from "Carmen Jones," and William Veasey, a tall and solemn newcomer with a pipe-organ voice.

Mr. Ward's story concerns a group of freed men for whom Mr. Veasey is spokesman and prophet, who take the suggestion of General Sherman and settle on an island off the Georgia coast. They are free, and this means they can own land. They work this land, building diligently for the future—and then, a few months later, the same United States Army which sponsored the ownership comes to dispossess them. A typical white plantation owner has laid claim to the island and the Army must back his claim—with force.

No Soapbox Stuff.

Mr. Ward's play contains no soapbox oratory; it merely faces the facts as they were and manages to give a heartwarming, yet heartbreaking, glimpse into the lives of some lowly human beings. It is in ten episodes, and their chief disadvantage is that they don't have much cumulative effect.

The Theatre Guild is not the sponsor—just a friend willing to lend its intelligent audience if the audience cares to take advantage of the opportunity. The producers are Eddie Dowling and Louis Singer, who hit a financial and artistic jack pot with "The Glass Menagerie."

"Our Lan'" was first presented at the Henry Street Theatre by eight Associated Playwrights who once had attended a Guild seminar on playwriting. Edward R. Mitchell directed the production. At the Royale Theatre Mr. Mitchell is listed as associate director and Mr. Dowling as director.

Between them, and with the virtuose aid of Ralph Alswang, they have made the drama a beautiful thing to see; the groupings are expertly achieved, the songs are an integral part of the performance, and Mr. Alswang's simple, dramatic setting is made into a thing of living beauty by some of the best lighting I have ever seen.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

A Tragedy of the Negro In Reconstruction Days

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

When Theodore Ward's "Our Lan'" was given an off-Broadway tryout last season, drama critics who made the pilgrimage down to the Henry Street Playhouse to see it recognized that this tragedy of the Negro in Reconstruction days was a play of dignity, forthrightness and simple forcefulness. It needed tightening and strengthening in both the writing and direction, but even as it was it was infinitely superior to virtually everything that the commercial theatre was offering at the time. Its arrival on Broadway was looked forward to with high anticipation.

Last Saturday night at the Royale Theatre the long-awaited uptown opening took place, with William Veasey and Muriel Smith repeating their impressive performances in the leading roles, with Julie Haydon added to the cast in the modest art of a sympathetic school teacher from the North, and with the production restaged by the sympathetic, imaginative and emotionally understanding Eddie Dowling. The result, it is disconcerting to report, is not as stimulating as it should be.

Dignity and Emotion

"Our Lan'" is, as we travelers to the theatres outlying metropolitan districts had reported, a work of honest dignity and emotion, far superior in heart, mind and stature to the run of things in the contemporary drama. If only for the manner in which its simple tale of the betrayal of Negro hopes by their Yankee liberators after the death of Lincoln goes to counteract the romantic cinema and historical-novel myth about the harrowing wrongs of the noble Confederate aristocrats it would be a play worth of admiration and applause.

Such is the treacherous nature of the theatre, however, that this drama of noble intentions and achievements emerges on the unaccountable commercial stage with for less effectiveness than its potential merits warrant. Downtown, as I reported, it required tightening and strengthening. I'm afraid that was the talented Mr. Dowling, who is unquestionably one of the most valuable forces for good in the American drama, has done is to make it a little fancy. Simplicity and directness were two of the finest qualities of Mr. Ward's play, and they have been rather lost sight of amid the ambitiousness of the current staging.

The Spirituals

For example, I certainly didn't count the number of times spirituals were sung in the two productions of "Our Lan'," but it is my impression that there are many more of them in the commercial presentation. When only a few were used, the final scene, with the hero and heroine singing as they prepare to face death at the hands of their ex-liberators, was immensely poignant. In the present version the spirituals seem substitutes for drama, rather than serving to heighten it, because they are sung so often.

Mr. Veasey, a heroic, Lincolnesque actor, is completely believable as the selfless leader of his people, and Miss Smith is moving as the wayward heroine. Miss Haydon brings her touching gentleness to an infinitesimal role, and most of the other parts are well enough handled. "Our Lan'" is still an honest tragedy of the suffering displaced persons of an earlier war for freedom, but its finest potentialities are not achieved.

PM EXCLUSIVE

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

Hague

A Promising Theme Gets Lost in the Theater

In *Our Lan'*, Theodore Ward has turned the spotlight on a shameful and significant segment of United States history. He has attempted to present in terms of the stage the tragic case of the Negro in the South of the Reconstruction period, after the Civil War had freed him from slavery but left him insecure, for the most part homeless, without economic independence and without the means—or even the right—to fight for it.

To his task Mr. Ward has brought an uncommon gift for words, deep sincerity of purpose, considerable human understanding and compassion. That he has failed to give his theme vivid life and urgency in the theater is all the more regrettable and disappointing. For the stuff and materials of a hard-hitting social drama would seem to be there; but his realization of them on the stage of the Royale, while generally edifying and worthy of respect, is only intermittently effective and indifferently moving.

• • •

Our Lan' tells of a group of homeless and hungry freedmen to whom, just before the close of the war, Gen. Sherman has given a small island off the Georgia coast. Each man is granted 40 acres of land on which to make a home and provide subsistence for his family. Toiling together under their enterprising and stout-hearted leader, Joshua Tain, they succeed against almost insurmountable odds in raising their first crop of cotton—only to run into difficulties in marketing it and, what's more, to find themselves threatened with the loss of the land itself.

For, with the end of the war and the assassination of Lincoln, the winds of reaction are blowing in Washington. As they so often are, the things the war was fought for are forgotten. In its haste to pardon the planters and restore the economic machinery of the South, the government has let down the men it has freed, turning them over to an economic slavery. President Johnson has vetoed a bill which would have legalized their claim to the land. The same Union Army that gave Joshua and his people the land now comes to take it away from them. Confronted with either binding themselves to work for the former owner of the island for a few cents a day, or leaving the island, they refuse either alternative, and decide to defend with their lives the little community they have worked so hard to establish. As the curtain falls, they face certain annihilation from the Union guns, ready offshore to open fire upon them.

• • •

All this is set forth in an episodic and slow-moving play which only fitfully achieves compelling or absorbing interest. Nor does the love story that goes along with it—of Joshua and the island girl, Delphine—help matters much. Though sensitively handled, it is essentially timeworn and commonplace, belonging more to the tradition of musical comedy and operetta. And the use of a series of Spirituals—the singing of which enters patly on cue into almost every important scene—seems to impede rather than aid the progress of the story, to weaken rather than strengthen the whole dramatic fabric.

In fact, in its writing, and even more so in its staging, *Our Lan* tends to play up the picturesqueness, the folk quality of its people and story, when a strictly realistic treatment would seem to have served better in driving home its tragic story, and given it more the impact and significance it deserves on the contemporary stage. Only in its final scene does it strike a note approaching real tragedy for a moment, when Joshua and Delphine await death together on a darkening stage. But here, too, it veers off ultimately into the quasi-operatic, using the singing of *Deep River* for an emotional out, where a few simple words were all that were called for.

• • •

There are several fine individual performances. As Delphine, Muriel Smith makes a warm and appealingly human character out of what little the playwright has provided; and William Veasey brings strength, authority and a good voice to the role of Joshua. Two of the larger supporting roles are well filled by Valerie Black and Richard Angarola; Julie Haydon appears briefly as a New England schoolmistress who comes to the island to teach the children, and there's also a good bit by Margo Washington. But several parts are in less competent hands.

The physical production is a handsome one. Mr. Alswang's setting is serviceable and suitably atmospheric, and he has lighted it beautifully.

• • •

I did not see *Our Lan'* when it was put on last Spring by the Associated Playwrights at the Henry St. Playhouse, so I cannot say whether it has lost or gained in its trek uptown. But, even though it now falls short of its promise, those who had enough faith in it to sponsor it in the commercial theater deserve a good deal of credit for their pains. It is a lot more worthy of theater space than the usual run of Broadway fare. If we got more plays like it some day we'd be bound to get better ones, too.

—ROBERT A. HAGUE.

(Louis Kronenberger, PM's regular theater critic, is on vacation.)

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Tedious Hegira

A SUCCESSION of dull tableaux passes for a drama in "Our Lan.'" This Theodore Ward play about freed slaves in the Civil War period has come to Broadway with high expectations. It won considerable critical applause when it was shown at the Henry Street Playhouse last season. Promise is still evident in the Eddie Dowling-Louis J. Singer production at the Royale, but it has only been realized in fragmentary snatches. The truth is that for all its embattled sincerity and a threnody of spirituals, the latest offering of the autumn is both pompous and pretentious.

• • •

Much of the blame for a tedious historical work must be taken by Dowling. As the director of "Our Lan'," he has settled for attitudinizing and murky rhetorical speeches when he might have posed a provocative issue in significant dramatic action. There is so little gait to the proceedings that the anticlimax, in which former slaves fight the army to keep the island off the coast of Georgia which Sherman gave them, is a welcome melodramatic resolution of the plot. The author has arranged a few other conflicts between the Negroes, their white liberators and their former owners. He has introduced an inexplicit romance between the leader of the freedom and errant beauty. What is wanting is a cumulative and arresting exposition.

• • •

The acting is almost always at a higher level than the material and the manner of its presentation. William Veasey, in his first big-time assignment, brings dignity, anger and a splendid barytone to the role of Joshua, who marshals fugitives from Confederate plantations and gives them a brief interval of liberty and the pursuit of happiness on the island. In his performance there are glints of the indignation which might have made "Our Lan'" a powerful theatrical account of the tragic circumstances which followed Lincoln's assassination. Muriel Smith, who will be remembered for "Carmen Jones," is equally self-assured and dynamic in the anomalous role of the pregnant woman whom he chooses for a wife.

• • •

The others in a large cast add moments of power to a turgid and rambling script. Valerie Black speaks and acts with authority when she is given a chance; Julie Haydon tries hard to wedge her way into the doings as a sympathetic white teacher who casts her lot with the rebellious Negroes and Emory Richardson gives Biblical emphasis to an 1865 quest for a promised land. All of the performers are at their best when they are chanting the choral arrangements of Joshua Lee, which is another way of saying that the play itself is not good. Ralph Alswang's sets and lighting effects, incidentally, deserve more consequence than you will find in "Our Lan'."

Daily Mirror

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

'Our Lan' Opens At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "Our Lan'," which Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer have installed in the Royale Theatre, Theodore Ward has attempted to combine a play and a concert. The result is not successful. The numerous spirituals slow up the drama and leave too little time for the satisfactory development of character.

"Our Lan'" has to do with the brave fight of a band of Negro freed men and women to develop and hold land given them by Gen. Sherman on an island off the Georgia coast at the close of the Civil War.

After they have labored heroically to improve holdings and produce crops, they lose out when President Andrew Johnson vetoes a bill making Sherman's decrees legal. A tragic conflict ensues.

There is a play in that material, but Ward hasn't done it justice. He limns types rather than people. His heroes wear halos and his villains sport horns. They are painted in violent whites and blacks, with not enough medium tones.

The spirituals, too, came at some of the most dramatic moments, and merely stopped the development of the story temporarily, instead of forwarding it. We began to get the feeling that someone ought to rush over from Town Hall and take 'em away.

Anyway, Dowling and Singer have obtained the best possible singers for the spirituals. Remember attractive Muriel Smith, who sang the title role in "Carmen Jones"? And there's William Veasy, who spent 10 years in European music halls, earning the title of "Black Chaliapin."

Other capables in the large cast of actors and singers are Julie Haydon, Valerie Black, Emory Richardson, Estelle Rolfe Evans, Richard Angarola, Augustus Smith and Service Bell.

Miss Haydon plays a New England school teacher with such sweetness and light that we expected her to sprout Little Eva wings and fly away. She seemed a little too fragile and delicate to survive for long on a mosquito-infested, fever-ridden, poverty-stricken island.

But there wasn't one squawk out of this gentle soul during the entire evening. She never soiled her dress, never got an insect-bite welt on her fair skin, never had trouble eating and thriving on a limited diet. She just wasn't human, that's all.

Dowling, assisted by Edward R. Mitchell, is responsible for the direction. His groupings are striking and effective, but we do wish he had persuaded author Ward to make his characters more believable, more balanced, and had cut out some of the pace-retarding chorals.

Ralph Alswang has designed a stunning set.

Journal American

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

Soul of Folk Play Lost on Broadway

By ROBERT GARLAND

With this space on record (April 21, 1947) and George Jean Nathan dealing with "Our Lan'," today, there's small reason to go into detail where the Eddie Dowling-Louis Singer reproduction of Theodore Ward's folk-play is concerned. Suffice it to report that the trip from the Neighborhood Playhouse to the Royale Theatre has been accomplished not without mischance.

If, up on 45th st. in September, "Our Lan'" doesn't look and sound as genuine, stirring and naive as it looked and sounded down on Grand last April, the fault may be placed at the professional showshop's door.

Last Saturday night, with Broadway taking over, something fine and moving had disappeared from the Negro playwright's script. That something was simplicity.

Does it sound silly to suggest that a play can lose its soul? If it does, then let it!

• • •

Merits Minimized

Broadway has magnified the folk-play's faults and miminized its merits.

A season or so ago, it did this very thing to Gerald Murray's "Career Angel," which came from ardent amateurs on 57th Street. And, in a way, to Philip Yordan's "Anna Lucasta," which came from ardent amateurs in Harlem. Off Broadway success d'estimes are prone to be alergic to commercial transportation.

Even so, with its faults shown up and its merits shown down, "Our Lan'" on 45th Street has managed to maintain some of its Grand Street moments of heartbreak and exaltation.

Especially when the historic background of the play is being featured and the private foreground of its characters are being ignored. It's Theodore Ward's plotting for which Broadway professionalism is bad.

Back in April I pointed out that the piece's "secondary story"

was, even down on Grand Street, a handicap.

• • •

Sincerity Overridden

Now, up on 45th st., that "secondary story" is even more of a handicap than ever. On a professional stage, under professional direction, the playwright's obvious inexperience frequently overides the playwright's equally obvious sincerity.

This wasn't so downtown. Broadway's well-meant slicking up has done "Our Lan'" more harm than good.

But it hasn't harmed the superb quality of William Vessy's Joshua or the glowing rightness of Muriel Smith's Delphine. And Valerie Black and Chauncey Reynolds are their fine selves again as Ellen and Lem.

As the white school-teacher from New England, Julie Haydon never looked lovelier, even if she hasn't got a single thing to do. The spirituals are indeed touching.

I should have known that Broadway wasn't exactly suited to "Our Lan'." And the other way around. If I'm proven wrong, I'll be delighted.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 29, 1947

'Our Lan' Has Simple Story and No Punch

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Our Lan'" is an elemental presentation of a historical incident that followed the Civil War. It moves on a thin line between being beautifully simple and moving, and being just simple. Unfortunately it never achieves any subjective dramatic punch.

The narrative proves little beyond the fact that the object of a war is seldom realized. That it is true and that the story has inherent tragedy by no means makes it vivid theater, despite its genuine feeling.

By postwar law, a group of freed slaves takes over an island off Georgia and there builds homes and raises a crop. When the law is rescinded they refuse to leave and are wiped out by the Union Army that fought for their rights.

Touching Love Story.

There is a touching love story of a former housemaid who has grown up on the island, and the leader of the group which comes there. As an older man he refuses to reciprocate her love and she succumbs to an educated mulatto from the mainland. When the others jibe at her because she is to be a mother, the leader publicly claims her, and in the end she refuses to leave him, though death is certain.

The simplicity of the story and the characters is quite lovely, but the play has a monotonous tone that makes it all seem dreamily far away.

One of the great racial virtues of these people is their wit and good humor, which so often stays with them under adversity. In "Our Lan'" there is scarcely a glimmer of playfulness until the next to the last scene.

Dramatic Contrast.

Certainly, too, there is ample dramatic justification for expressing jubilation at the prospect of a new free life, or at the production of a bumper crop. But the characters here accept good fortune with devout solemnity. This may not only be human but appropriate, but it denies an opportunity for dramatic contrast.

The play is graced with a number of excellent performances, chief among them that of Muriel Smith. Miss Smith has a grace and assurance about everything she does that makes the character of the former housemaid utterly believable and human in her development. She also sings exquisitely, with a rare combination of taste and control.

William Veasey makes the freedmen's leader a figure of dignity and power. He is able to portray a touching warmth and implacable authority melded into a full blooded human being.

Julie Haydon Effective.

In a small role of a school teacher Julie Haydon is extremely effective as she tellingly invests the character with an air of placid dedication.

Other roles are effectively wrought by Valerie Black, Theresa Merritte, Richard Angaroia and Edith Atuka Reid. The cast as a whole is a model group for its capacity of absorption and sustaining character.

Eddie Dowling has staged the play with tenderness and a fluid motion, and Ralph Alswang has made a basic set that allows variety and color of movement.

"Our Lan'," with more definite climactic scenes and greater emotional contrast has the potential of being a most effective native opera.

"I Gotta Get Out"

New York Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 26, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

May Need Race

THE devious doings of the bookies propel "I Gotta Get Out" through three acts of racetrack jargon, ponderous punning and wisps of a plot at the Cort Theater. This new comedy by Joseph Fields and Ben Sher makes a valiant attempt to be colorful and antic. It assembles illegal bettakers, a Nassau dowager and her niece, a couple of manicurists, detectives and even a psychoanalyst in such cozy quarters as a bookie hideaway, the kitchen of a Long Island masion and the clubhouse at Belmont Park. As the title suggests, it has most of them losing their shirts and trying to get them back on the last race. Unfortunately, their somewhat frenetic efforts are not very funny.

• • •

Certainly one might have expected something better from the author of "The Doughgirls" than the suggestion of one of the characters that the boys form a "bookie of the month club," or the retort of a tout when cum laude is mentioned—"come louder and funnier." Several of the figures in the show have humorous possibilities, particularly the tougher of the nail-polishers and the somewhat bewildered dowager, who finds her home invaded by the bookies. Both are drawn with a somewhat satirical bite and both are played effectively. Even they are tripped up by lines which are rarely amusing and situations which are contrived and cumbersome.

• • •

The authors know their milieu. The straight patter or the dialogue is right enough and the scene at Belmont, with Bert Lee of WHN giving an off-stage broadcast of the races, might have been a novel and entrancing background for fooling. The trouble is that the action plods when it should have crackled with laughter. It is not that the comedy has too much plot. It just veers aimlessly around, as the hero gets in a jam with his bookie boss and his sweetheart's aunt gets thrown in the jug, charged with being a front for a horse parlor.

• • •

It is small wonder that the principals and a large assortment of extras get somewhat lost in the proceedings. Peggy Maley succeeds in being lusty and tough as the babe who almost wins a mink coat on the ponies. Edith Meiser brings a nice dizzy touch to the part of auntie, while Reed Brown jr., David Burns and Hal Neiman, as the bookies, are as good as their lines permit them to be. John Conway and Peggy Van Vleet play the boy and girl with something less than persuasion. The Raymond Sovey settings are far better than the make-believe they inclose. The Fields direction is not.

'I GOTTA GET OUT.'

Comedy by Joseph Fields and Ben Sher; staged by Joseph Fields; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by Herbert H. Harris and Lester Meyer at the Cort Theater, Thursday evening, September 25, 1947. The cast:

Swifty	Reed Brown Jr.
Bernie	David Burns
Radtke	Hal Neiman
Timmie	John Conway
Frances	Eileen Larson
Gussie	Peggy Maley
Mary	Peggy Van Vleet
Mrs. Clark	Edith Meiser
A taxicab driver	Ralph Smiley
Larry	Ted Erwin
Dr. Perrin	Edwin Whitner
Constantin	Richard Shankland
Stoddard	Harry K. Smith
Angie	Kenneth Forbes
Dr. Flughman	E. A. Krumschmidt
Jake	Don Gruase
Steve	Griff Evans
Hogan	Mickey Cochran
A woman player	Ruth Saville
Broderick	Dan Evans
A ticket seller	Charles F. O'Connor
Jerry	Ralph Simone
A player	Robert Gallagher
Another player	Charles Rondeau
A second woman player	Vici Raaf
A third woman player	Barbara Thorson
Tom Hill	Donald Foster
A waiter	William Ayrey

SYNOPSIS—Time: The Present. Place: Greater New York. Act I, Scene 1, A Bookmaker's Poolroom. Above a Stable. Late Afternoon. Scene 2, The Kitchen of Mrs. Clark's Home in Nassau, Long Island. The Next Morning. Act II, Belmont Park. Early Afternoon. Act III, The Kitchen of Mrs. Clark's Home. A Few Hours Later.

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 26, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

There must be something entertaining about playing the horses, since the police are so opposed to it. But Joseph Fields and Ben Sher are not much more entertaining than the constabulary in "I Gotta Get Out," which was acted out of the corner of the mouth at the Cort last evening.

For the sake of variety they are taking the side of the independent bookies, who are devoted to public service at the end of the telephone wire. Swifty, Bernie and Radtke, with brassy molls for two of them, spend most of the evening simultaneously fleeing the law and attending to the needs of their customers.

* * *

According to the formulas for racing shows, "I Gotta Get Out" ought to be fine for guffawing. Experts on the horses invariably lose in this comedy, but the innocents invariably win; and every student of the drama knows that this situation is technically funny. A respectable society lady, in the interests of charity, rents her kitchen to Swifty, Bernie and Radtke as a wire room. According to the laws of dramaturgy, this should be hilarious.

But "I Gotta Get Out" is as mechanical as a refrigerator and just about as funny. Mr. Fields' rudimentary direction is largely responsible. For the pace he has set his actors is exhausting without being crackling or rhythmical and lines that are comical enough in the writing sound heavy-handed in the performance. You need the master's hand to turn this sort of fooling into professional vaudeville. Even the master's hand could not transform "I Gotta Get Out" into much more than an imitation of better skulduggery. It takes three men on a horse comedy. "I Gotta Get Out" has only two.

Journal American

SEPTEMBER 26, 1947

Racetrack Comedy Nice But Indifferent

By ROBERT GARLAND

If the New York Telephone Company doesn't squawk about last night's opening, there's no reason why a drama critic should. For, in their "racetrack comedy" put on by Herbert Harris and Lester Myer, Joseph Fields and Ben Sher let the drama critics be as they give the metropolitan branch of the Bell System a shellacking.

You who've sometimes wondered just how local away-from-the-racetrack bet-makers manage to equip their betting-parlors with active but unlisted instruments while a law abiding citizen can't manage to get himself a telephone for love or money, should look in on "I Gotta Get Out" before its stopover on 48th st. is cancelled.

Why? Because there are enough telephone instruments on-stage at the Cort to equip a hospital. And, as the playwrights' leading bookies move their betting parlor from a midtown loft to Mrs. Clark's residence in Nassau, the telephone instruments move right along with them.

* * *

Mixed-up Mixup

Larry, "a telephone man," sees to that. And Swifty, Bernie and Radtke, three men on the horses, see to Larry. And Larry sees to his boss, splitting, if I remember, fifty-fifty. Just who Larry's boss sees to and splits with is not made clear. And thereby hangs the tale of last night's Broadway opening.

In the employ of Swifty, Bernie and Radtke is Timmie. Timmie's a good boy who never lets his right hand know what horse his left hand's playing. He, himself, doesn't seem to know. So you're not surprised when Timmie's girl friend, a prig of a girl called Mary, is concurrently confused. I'm not, either!

Mixed up in this mixup are a doctor, a patient, a broker, a psychoanalyst, a shipping clerk, a bartender, a horse breeder, a writer, a detective, manicurist, another manicurist and any number of wisecracks which are, in themselves, amusing. But they're not a comedy.

Not Good, Not Bad

Taking the players as they come in "Who's Who" in the program, David Burns acts with all his might and main as the leading bet-taker; Edith Meiser, with "Vassar behind her," looks well in her Jay Thorpe costumes, and Reed Brown's believable enough as Swifty, number two bet-taker in the telephone.

Peggy Maley's a refugee from Hollywood as "another manicurist"; Peggy van Vleet's a truly priggish Mary, Eileen Larson, as THE manicurist, is a Member of the Society of Models; E. A. Krumschmidt, as the psychoanalyst, is a survivor of last season's "Miracle in the Mountains," and Hal Neiman, the Radtke, has "flowered in vaudeville."

The others will bear a bit of kindness, along with Joseph Fields' direction and Raymond Sovey's setting. So, being neither good nor bad, but persistently indifferent, I'll be nice to "I Gotta Get Out" if the New York Telephone Company will play along with me.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 26, 1947

'I Gotta Get Out' Here; It Probably Will Soon

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"I Gotta Get Out" is such a natural title for disparaging paraphrase, that it seems best to simply say it probably will before too long, and leave it at that.

A scattered, fabricated and stale humored distant relative of "Three Men on a Horse," this confusion about betting on horses by phone is distinguished by some remarkably overworked jokes, mediocre acting and incoherent direction.

It is the kind of farce setup that needs whiplash movement and cut-glass wit to keep you diverted from the unlikelihood of its narrative. It meanders artificially and the laughs usually come from nervous bellowing on the stage.

Three Bookies on the Run.

The plot concerns the determination of three bookies to evade the police, and service their customers if it means operating from the stratosphere.

One of them has an innocent assistant who is supposed to be splitting the bets he makes for his deceitful former boss. His girl is ignorant of this activity, but has an aunt with a pleasant house near Belmont. In no time at all the whole outfit, including a couple of camp following manicurists, have moved into the aunt's kitchen and have installed three new phones there.

The aunt has a way of unconsciously giving people tips, and she also has a girlhood admirer who now breeds horses, who meets her on her first trip to the track.

Aunt Cynthia Arrested.

He saves the day when Aunt Cynthia is arrested for the bets which were made from her house. Once she is assured of no further police intervention, the bookies rent the place from her as an operations center.

There are numerous variations on this general theme. As each one comes to a head it brings a recollection of having been extraneously planted some minutes before. The general effect is one of an insufficient framework repeatedly patched and bolstered with the ransackings of a long-time file of racing gags.

Several dozen people are involved in this melee, and none of them can be said to glitter. The timing of the performance has bad lapses that sound as if someone had forgotten lines, when actually the movement has not been planned to cover the unnecessary silence.

Frequently performers are allowed to read perfectly simple lines as if they had not the faintest notion what they meant.

Not Funny, but Loud.

By dint of frowning, posturing and bellowing with anger, a blonde named Peggy Maley gives vitality to a gold hearted cookie in the cuticle remover business. When her lines are not funny she says them loud with a kind of dumb significance of her own, which gets laughs, and is about the best way to treat them.

David Burns makes one of the bookies humanly unscrupulous, and Hal Neiman and Reed Brown Jr. do what they can with the other two. As the victimized aunt, Edith Meiser is gentle and vague, but nobody seems quite to have made up his mind what this character was really about.

The pleasantly postcardy sets are by Raymond Sovey.

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 28, 1947

'I Gotta Get Out,' Horse Comedy, Can't Win or Even Place: No Show

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Maybe the management of this paper should have sent one of the gents from across the hall in the sports department to cover last evening's premiere of "I Gotta Get Out."

A sportswriter, being an expert, might turn in a more comprehending report of what went on at the Cort Theatre. But I was the guy who went and I, no expert, can only report that bookmakers and their sweetie-pies are awful dull people.

This play, by Joseph Fields and Ben Sher, is in racetrack jargon. The second act, indeed, is right at Belmont Park, and the rise of the curtain upon Raymond Sovey's setting drew whinnies of recognition from the patrons of the Cort Theatre's $6 window. A large cast employed by producers Herbert Harris and Lester Meyer mills colorfully about, obscuring the view.

No "Three Men."

Once there was a very good play about horse betting—the John Cecil Holm-George Abbott "Three Men on a Horse." In trying to figure out why this comedy was funnier than the new one, I have come to think that "Three Men" was about people and "I Gotta Get Out" isn't. I just could not find myself swept into the lives of, and sympathizing with, the many characters whom Mr. Fields and Mr. Sher have assembled.

Nor did I need a rubdown after having been through the plot, for I never got in a sweat about it. It's about some bookmakers who, fleeing the cops, set up operations in the suburban kitchen of a sweet and innocent woman named Aunt Cynthia. There also is a love story which goes something like this: Boy loves girl, boy loses dough, boy loses girl, girl comes back anyhow.

Quieter and Funnier.

Mr. Fields is no amateur at writing comedy and "I Gotta Get Out" does have some sharp and punchy lines; but it has many more which never get over. In a frantic search for jokes the authors have tried almost everything—except having a well knit and plausible story. The play seems less a piece for the theatre than it is for a sports arena—a contest to see which actor can tell the most race track gags the loudest. If Mr. Fields, who directed, doesn't advise his people to quit yelling they're all going to come down with laryngitis by Saturday. Which might be just in time.

Among the players I found considerable pleasure in the work of David Burns and Edith Meiser, who gave the impression that they were creating character—Mr. Burns as a bookie and Miss Meiser as Aunt Cynthia. In the role of a blonde manicurist who wants a mink coat, a West Coast debutante named Peggy Maley plays as loosely as she is clad and is all over the place in both departments. A good many of the first-nighters found her hilarious, but I advise her to watch the neat, sure work of Judy Holliday in "Born Yesterday" if she wants to get tough about it.

PM EXCLUSIVE

SEPTEMBER 28, 1947

Bookies Take Another Shellacking at Cort

By JOHN S. WILSON

One of the simpler ways of kissing off someone's dramatic brainchild is to label the characters implausible. *I Gotta Get Out* has avoided this possibility by dealing with the bookie set, a segment of our society which contains many characters too implausible even for writers of farce.

But aside from this bit of foresight, the authors have jumped with seeming willingness into practically every available pitfall. Intellectually, most of the characters would have difficulty holding their own with a dull two-year-old (human, that is, not horse). The activities of these characters are based on some vague financial dilemmas which are solved, surprisingly enough, by some even vaguer betting. The situations are more indicative of authorial desperation than imagination and the wit is on a level with the fillers high school papers used to scatter among the ads.

• • •

If this sounds like pure crotchedyness, I submit one sample of the humor:

She: "Lend me $50 on account."

He: "On account of what?"

She: "On account of I'm broke."

So help me, this got a slight laugh on opening night, which may prove that good will still is alive in some quarters even though it is running slightly low in this department.

• • •

To its credit, it must be said that *I Gotta Get Out* is a farce in which a set with three doors is used and not once does a character run breathlessly through any of these entrances, banging it behind him. On the other hand, the three bookies who carry the burden of the play are constantly answering telephones which are never merely hung up at the end of a conversation—they are always slammed down, usually missing the cradle and requiring a moment or two of fussing around to get them straightened out.

These bookies are involved with a fledgling bookie who has become mixed up in a deal by which he has managed to go several hundred dollars in debt to the head bookie and with the fledgling's girl's aunt who needs $6000 for a children's camp. These problems are discussed for two and a half acts until the eighth race at Belmont brings them to a merciful conclusion.

• • •

Except in a few cases, the unusually large cast is of little help in making the authors' lines seem any better than they are. David Burns, an adept comic, does wonders with the material at hand as one of the bookies, Peggy Maley manages to squeeze a little earthy humor from the role of a manicurist and Dan Grusso contrives a few bright moments as a tip hunter.

Joseph Fields, who has shown in *The Doughgirls* that he can do better than this, can presumably be shouldered with most of the blame since, in addition to being co-author, he has directed the play in static fashion. But, to end on a brighter note, Raymond Sovey's settings are on a level far above the rest of the production.

(John S. Wilson, PM's Sports Editor, is guesting for PM's regular Drama Critic, Louis Kronenberger, who is on vacation.)